

# ABOUT CHRISTMAS

NICOLAE SFETCU



# **About Christmas**

Nicolae Sfetcu

Published by Nicolae Sfetcu

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# About Christmas



*Birth of Christ* (1503), by Albrecht Dürer.

**Also called:** Christ's Mass

**Observed by:** Christians around the world as well as by non-Christians who observe the secular aspects of the holiday.

**Type:** Christian, international

**Significance:** traditional birthdate of Jesus

**Date:** December 25 (January 7 in Old Calendarist Orthodox Churches)

**Observances:** religious services, gift giving, family meetings, decorating trees

**Related to:** Annunciation, Incarnation; Crucifixion; Advent, the four weeks preceding Christmas; and the period between the day after Thanksgiving and the Sunday after New Year's Day, the American holiday season

**Christmas** or **Christmas Day** is a holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus, the central figure of Christianity. Aspects of celebration may include gift-giving, [Christmas trees](#), display of [Nativity sets](#), church attendance, the [Father Christmas/Santa Claus](#) myth, and family gatherings. Users of the Gregorian calendar observe the holiday on December 25. Some

Eastern Orthodox Churches celebrate on December 25 by the Julian calendar, which currently corresponds to January 7 on the Gregorian calendar. These dates are merely traditional; the great majority of scholars agree that the actual birthdate of Jesus is unknown.

The word *Christmas* is derived from Middle English *Christemasse* and from Old English *Cristes mæsse*. It is a contraction meaning "Christ's mass". The name of the holiday is often shortened to [Xmas](#) because Roman letter "X" resembles the Greek letter  $\chi$  (chi), an abbreviation for Christ ( $\chi$ rist).

In Western countries, Christmas is the most economically significant holiday of the year, and is even celebrated by non-Christians. The popularity of Christmas can be traced in part to its status as a winter festival. Many cultures have their most important holiday in winter because there is less agricultural work to do at this time. Examples of winter festivals that are believed by some to have influenced Christmas include the pre-Christian festivals of Yule and Saturnalia, and many of the traditions associated with the holiday have origins in these pagan winter celebrations.

In Western culture, the holiday is characterized by the exchange of gifts among friends and family members, some of the gifts being attributed to [Santa Claus](#) (also known as [Father Christmas](#), [Saint Nicholas](#), Saint Basil and Father Frost). However, various local and regional Christmas traditions are still practiced, despite the widespread influence of American, British and Australian Christmas motifs disseminated by film, popular literature, television, and other media.

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## History

### Origin of holiday

Although no one knows on which date Jesus was born, Christians have favored December 25 since ancient times. It is the date on which the Romans marked the winter solstice and it is nine months following the Festival of Annunciation (March 25). In ancient and early Medieval times, Christmas was either a minor feast, or not celebrated at all.

Around 220, the theologian Tertullian declared that Jesus died on March 25, AD 29, but was resurrected 3 days later. Although this is not a plausible date for the crucifixion, it does suggest that March 25 had significance for the church even before it was used as a basis to calculate Christmas. Modern scholars favor a crucifixion date of April 3, AD 33 (also the date of a partial lunar eclipse).[2] (These are Julian calendar dates. Subtract two days for a Gregorian date.)

By 240, a list of significant events was being assigned to March 25, partly because it was believed to be the date of the vernal equinox. These events include creation, the fall of Adam, and, most relevantly, the Incarnation.[3] The view that the Incarnation occurred on the same date as crucifixion is consistent with a Jewish belief that prophets died at an "integral age," either an anniversary of their birth or of their conception.[4][5]



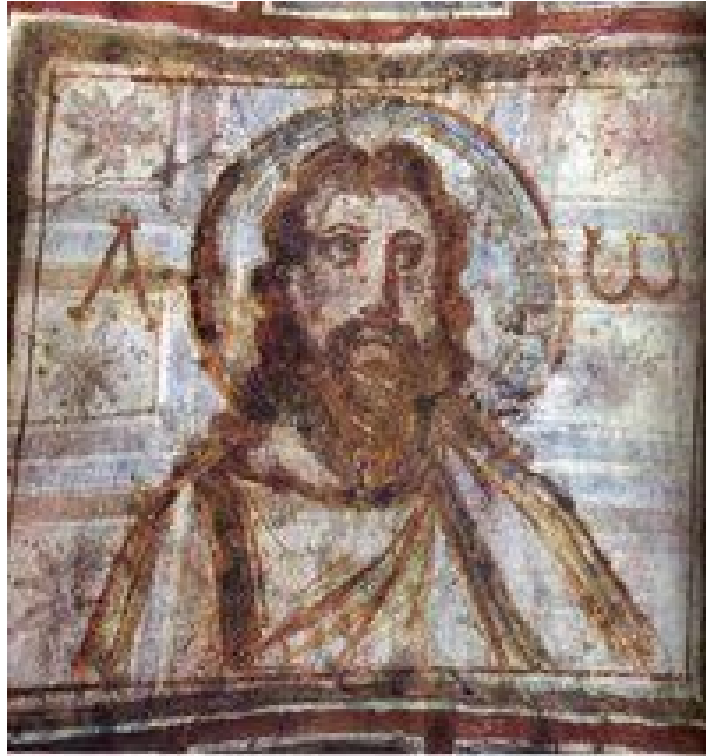
*Adoration of the shepherds* (1535-40), by Florentine Mannerist painter Agnolo Bronzino

Aside from being nine months later than Annunciation, December 25 is also the date the Romans marked the winter solstice, which they referred to as *bruma*. For this reason, some have suggested the opposite of the theory outlined above, i.e. that the date of Christmas was chosen to be the same as that of the solstice and that the date of Annunciation was calculated on this basis. (The Julian calendar was originally only one day off, with the solstice falling on December 24 in 45 BC. Due to calendar slippage, the date of the astronomical solstice has moved back so that it now falls on either December 21 or December 22).

The idea that December 25 is Jesus' birthday was popularized by Sextus Julius Africanus in *Chronographiai* (AD 221), an early reference book for Christians. This identification did not at first inspire feasting or celebration. In 245, the theologian Origen denounced the idea of celebrating the birthday of Jesus "as if he were a king pharaoh." Only sinners, not saints, celebrate their birthdays, Origen contended.

In 274, Emperor Aurelian designated December 25 as the festival of *Sol Invictus* (the "unconquered sun"). Aurelian may have chosen this date because the solstice was considered the birthday of Mithras, a syncretic god of Persian origin. Mithras is often identified with *Sol Invictus*, although *Sol* was originally a separate Syrian god.

Mithras was a god of light and a child of the earth who sprang up next to a sacred stream. He was born bearing a torch and armed with a knife. Sundays were dedicated to Mithras and caves were often used for his worship. A series of emperors promoted Mithraism beginning with Commodus. The cult emphasized loyalty to the emperor and Roman soldiers were expected to participate. Mithraism collapsed rapidly after Constantine I withdrew imperial favor (312), despite being at the peak of its popularity only a few years earlier.



Mural painting of Jesus from the catacombs of Rome, late 4th century.

As Constantine ended persecution, Christians began to debate the nature of Christ. The Alexandrian school argued that he was the divine word made flesh (see John 1:14), while the Antioch school held that he was born human and infused with the Holy Spirit at the time of his baptism (see [Mark 1:9-11](#)). A feast celebrating Christ's birth gave the church an opportunity to promote the intermediate view that Christ was divine from the time of his incarnation.<sup>[6]</sup> Mary, a minor figure for early Christians, gained prominence as the theotokos, or god-bearer. There were Christmas celebrations in Rome as early as 336. December 25 was added to the calendar as a feast day in 350.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **Medieval Christmas and related winter festivals**

Christmas soon outgrew the Christological controversy that created it and came to dominate the medieval calendar. The forty days before Christmas became the "forty days of St. Martin," now Advent. The fortieth day after Christmas was Candlemas. The Egyptian Christmas celebration on January 6 was adopted as Epiphany, one of the most prominent holidays of the year during Early Middle Ages. Christmas Day itself was a relatively minor holiday, although its prominence gradually increased after Charlemagne was crowned on Christmas Day, 800.

Although the nativity narrative is among the most compelling stories in the Bible, other Christian holidays such as Easter are more significant from a strictly religious point of view. The popularity of Christmas can be better understood if it is viewed as a form of winter celebration. Agricultural societies typically hold their most important festival in winter since there is less need of farm work at this time.



The Romans had a winter celebration known as Saturnalia. This festival was originally held on December 17 and honored Saturn, a god of agriculture. It recalled the "golden age" when Saturn ruled. In imperial times, Saturnalia was extended to seven days (December 17-23). Combined with festivals both before and after, the result was an extended winter holiday season. Business was postponed and even slaves feasted. There was drinking, gambling and singing naked. It was the "best of days," according to the poet Catullus.<sup>[7]</sup> With the coming of Christianity, Italy's Saturnalian traditions were attached to Advent (the forty days before Christmas). Around the 12th century, these traditions transferred again to the "twelve days of Christmas" (i.e. Christmas to Epiphany).<sup>[6]</sup>

Northern Europe was the last part to Christianize, and its pagan celebrations had a major influence on Christmas. Scandinavians still call Christmas *Jul* (Yule), originally the name of a twelve-day pre-Christian winter festival. Logs were lit to honor Thor, the god of thunder, hence the "Yule log." In Germany, the equivalent holiday is called *Mitwinternacht* (mid-winter night). There are also twelve *Rauhnächte* (harsh or wild nights).<sup>[8]</sup>

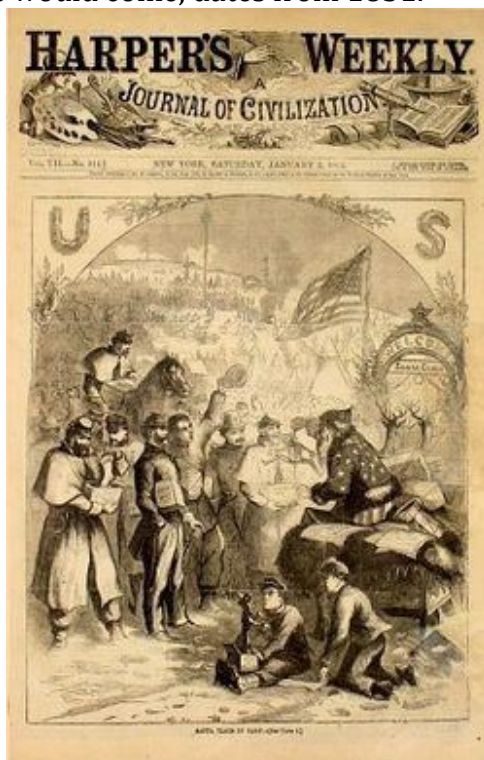
By the High Middle Ages, Christmas had become so prominent that chroniclers routinely note where various magnates "celebrated Christmas." King Richard II of England hosted a Christmas feast in 1377 at which twenty-eight oxen and three hundred sheep were eaten. The "Yule boar" was a common feature of medieval Christmas feasts. Aside from feasting, there was also caroling. This was originally a group of dancers who sang. There was a lead singer and a ring of dancers that provided the chorus. Various writers of the time condemn caroling as lewd, the dancing may have got out of hand now and then (harking back to the traditions of Saturnalia and Yule).<sup>[6]</sup> "Misrule" — drunkenness, promiscuity, gambling — was an important aspect of the festival. In England, gifts were exchanged on New Year's Day, and there was special Christmas ale.<sup>[6]</sup>

## The Reformation and modern times

During the Reformation, Protestants condemned Christmas celebration as "trappings of popery" and the "rags of the Beast". The Catholic Church responded by promoting the festival in a more religiously oriented form. When a Puritan parliament triumphed over the King Charles I of England (1644), Christmas was officially banned (1647). Pro-Christmas rioting broke out in several cities. For several weeks, Canterbury was controlled by the rioters, who decorated doorways with holly and shouted royalist slogans.<sup>[9]</sup> The Restoration (1660) ended the ban, but Christmas celebration was still disapproved of by the Anglican clergy (and, therefore, more thoroughly enjoyed by Catholics and Dissenters).

By the 1820s, sectarian tension had eased and British writers began to worry that Christmas was dying out. They imagined Tudor Christmas as a time of heartfelt celebration, and efforts were made to revive the holiday. The book *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles Dickens played a major role in reinventing Christmas as a holiday emphasizing family, goodwill, and compassion (as opposed to communal celebration and hedonistic excess).<sup>[10]</sup> The phrase "[Christmas tree](#)" is first recorded in 1835 and represents the importation of a tradition from Germany, where such trees became popular in the late 18th century.<sup>[11]</sup> Queen Victoria and her German-born husband Prince Albert enthusiastically promoted Christmas trees, as well as the idea of placing gifts under them. The royal family's tree of 1848 was

widely publicized and imitated. [Christmas cards](#) were first designed in 1843 and became popular in the 1860s.<sup>[11]</sup> The commercial calendar, created to answer children's questions concerning when Christmas would come, dates from 1851.



[Santa Claus](#) hands out gifts to Union soldiers during the US Civil War in Thomas Nast's first Santa Claus cartoon, *Harper's Weekly*, 1863.

The Puritans of New England disapproved of Christmas and celebration was outlawed in Boston (1659-81). Virginia and New York, meanwhile, celebrated freely. Christmas fell out of favor after the American Revolution, when it was considered an "English custom". Interest was revived by several short stories by Washington Irving in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819) and by "Old Christmas" (1850) which depict harmonious warm-hearted holiday traditions Irving claimed to have observed in England. Although some argue that Irving invented the traditions he describes, they were imitated by his American readers.<sup>[2]</sup> German immigrants and the homecomings of the Civil War helped promote the holiday. Christmas was declared a federal holiday in 1870.

[Santa Claus](#) is derived from Saint Nicholas, or *Sinterklaas*, who gave candy to the Dutch children on December 6. Dutch settlers in New York brought this tradition with them. Irving writes of Saint Nicholas "riding over the tops of the trees, in that selfsame waggon wherein he brings his yearly presents to children."<sup>[12]</sup> The connection between Santa Claus and Christmas was popularized by the poem "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" (1822) by Clement Clarke Moore, which depicts Santa driving a sleigh pulled by reindeer and distributing gifts to children. His image was created by German-American cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840-1902), who drew a new image annually beginning in 1863. By the 1880s, Nast's Santa had evolved into the form we now recognize. The image was standardized by advertisers in the 1920s.<sup>[13]</sup> [Father Christmas](#) is first recorded in the 15th century,<sup>[11]</sup> but was associated with

holiday merrymaking and drunkenness until Victorian Britain remade his image to match that of Santa.



*Behold the merrits and grace  
Of bounteous Christmas Eve,  
Whom many thousands with one breath  
Cry out let him be put to death.  
Who misdeeds can never die  
So long as man hath memory.*

[Father Christmas](#) persuades the jury of his innocence in *The Examination and Tryal of Father Christmas* (1686) by Josiah King

In the midst of World War I, there was a Christmas truce between German and British troops in France (1914). Soldiers on both sides spontaneously began to sing Christmas carols and stopped fighting. The truce began on Christmas Day and continued for some time afterward. There was even a soccer game between the trench lines in which Germany's 133rd Royal Saxon Regiment is said to have bested Britain's Seaforth Highlanders 3-2.

Some muslims celebrate Christmas because the religion of Islam regards Jesus as a prophet, messenger and one of the top five human servants of God (Allah).

## The Nativity

The nativity narratives in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew focus on quite different aspects of the event. The Gospel of Mark, considered the earliest and most historical gospel according to the doctrine of Markan priority, does not include a nativity narrative.

In Luke, Mary learns from an angel that the Holy Spirit has caused her to be with child. Mary points out that she is a virgin and the angel responds that "with God nothing shall be impossible." Shortly thereafter, she and her husband Joseph leave their home in Nazareth to travel about 150 kilometres (90 miles) to Joseph's ancestral home, Bethlehem, in order to register for a census ordered by Emperor Augustus. Finding no room at the inns, they lodge in a stable. There Mary gives birth to Jesus. An angel of the lord goes to the fields and tells the shepherds the "tidings of joy." A heavenly host proclaims, "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests." The shepherds come to the manger to adore the infant Jesus ([Luke 1:5-2:20](#)).

In Matthew, [magi](#) arrive at the court of King Herod in Jerusalem and ask, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? We have observed the rising of his star, and we have come to pay him homage." (Compare to Numbers 24:17.) The word magi is traditionally translated as "wise men." The word connects them to the magi of Babylon who select Daniel their chief in the Book of Daniel. Daniel's magi interpret dreams and other portents. The book was well-known in ancient times for its prophecy concerning the messiah<sup>[14]</sup> ([Daniel 9:24-27](#)), a man who will be sent by God to lead the Jewish people.

Neither the names of the magi nor their number are specified in the [Bible](#), but tradition tells us there were three: Balthassar, Melchior, and Caspar. Balthassar is a Greek version of the Babylonian name Belshazzar. This is the name of a king in Daniel. Melchior means "The king is my light" in Aramaic. Caspar is a Latinized version of Gondophares, a Parthian (i.e. Persian) name. The magi are sometimes called kings because of prophecies that kings will do homage to the messiah ([Isaiah 60:3](#), [Psalms 72:11](#)).

Herod is disturbed by the magi's words and questions them closely, attempting to determine when the star first appeared and when the child was born. The king asks his advisors where the messiah will be born. They answer Bethlehem, birthplace of King David, and quote [Micah 5:2-4](#). "When you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage," a deceitful Herod tells the magi.



*Adoration of the Child* (1439-43), a mural by Florentine painter Fra Angelico.

As they travel to Bethlehem, the magi follow the star of Bethlehem, which leads them to a house where they find Jesus. Jesus is no longer in the manger described by Luke. He is a

child (*paidion*), not an infant (*brephos*). The magi present Jesus with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (If these gifts were chosen in view of [Isaiah 60:1-7](#), it may explain the magi's earlier trip to Jerusalem.)<sup>[15]</sup> In a dream, the magi received a divine warning of Herod's intent to kill the child, who he sees as a rival. Consequently, they return to their own country without telling Herod the result of their mission. An angel tells Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt. Meanwhile, Herod orders that all male children of Bethlehem under the age of 2 be killed. After Herod's death, the family settles in Nazareth ([Matthew 2:1-23](#)).

## Other dates of celebration

Although Christmas may be celebrated on December 25 -31 in historically Catholic and Protestant nations, in eastern Europe it is often celebrated on January 7. This is because the Orthodox church continues to use the Julian calendar for determining feast days.<sup>[16]</sup>

The Orthodox churches fast during the forty days before Christmas. Christmas is dubbed the "Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ." Armenian Christians celebrate Christmas on January 6.<sup>[17]</sup>

Dates for the secular aspects of the Christmas celebration also vary. In the United Kingdom, the [Christmas season](#) traditionally runs for twelve days beginning on [Christmas Day](#). These [twelve days of Christmas](#), a period of feasting and merrymaking, end on [Twelfth Night](#), the eve of the Feast of the [Epiphany](#). In medieval times, Swedish law provided for a Christmas peace (*julefrid*) of twenty days during which fines for robbery and manslaughter were doubled. On Knut's Day, the twentieth day after Christmas (January 13), Swedish children celebrate and throw out the family [Christmas tree](#) (*julgransplundring*).

The Christmas festive period has grown longer in some countries. In the U.S., the pre-Christmas shopping season begins on the day after Thanksgiving. In the Philippines, radio stations usually start playing Christmas music during what is called the "-ber months" (September, October, etc.).

Countries that celebrate Christmas on December 25 recognize the previous day as [Christmas Eve](#) and have various names for the day after Christmas. In the Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia, Lithuania and Poland, Christmas Day and the following day are called First and Second Christmas Day. In many European and Commonwealth countries, the first non-Sunday after Christmas is referred to as [Boxing Day](#). In Finland, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Austria, and Catalonia (Spain), the day is known as [St. Stephen's Day](#). In Quebec, the December 26 holiday is referred to as *Lendemain de Noël* ("the day after Christmas").

## Regional customs and celebrations

Main article: [Christmas worldwide](#)

Many Christmas practices originate in Germanic countries, including the [Christmas tree](#), the [Christmas ham](#), the [Yule log](#), holly, mistletoe, and the giving of presents. The prominence of Christmas in Germanic nations may be a form of carryover from the pagan midwinter holiday of Yule.

Russia banned Christmas celebration from 1917 until 1992. Several Christian denominations, notably the Jehovah's Witnesses, Puritans, and some fundamentalists, view Christmas as a pagan holiday not sanctioned by the [Bible](#).



In the southern hemisphere, Christmas is during the summer. This clashes with the traditional winter iconography, resulting in oddities such as a red fur-coated Santa Claus surfing in for a turkey barbecue on Australia's Bondi Beach. Japan has adopted Santa Claus for its secular Christmas celebration, but New Year's Day is a far more important holiday. In India, Christmas is often called *bada din* ("the big day"), and celebration revolves around Santa Claus and shopping. In South Korea, Christmas is celebrated as an official holiday.

## Santa Claus and other bringers of gifts

Gift-giving is a near-universal part of Christmas celebrations. The concept of a mythical figure who brings gifts to children derives from [Saint Nicholas](#), a bishop of Myra in fourth century Lycia, Asia Minor. He made a pilgrimage to Egypt and Palestine in his youth and soon thereafter became Bishop of Myra. He was imprisoned during the persecution of Diocletian and released after the accession of Constantine. He may have been present at the Council of Nicaea, though there is no record of his attendance. He died on December 6 in 345 or 352. In 1087, Italian merchants stole his body at Myra and brought it to Bari in Italy. His relics are preserved in the church of San Nicola in Bari. An oily substance known as Manna di S. Nicola, which is highly valued for its medicinal powers, is said to flow from his relics.<sup>[18]</sup>

The Dutch recognized a [Saint Nicholas](#), or Sinterklaas, who gave gifts on the eve of his feast day of December 6. He became associated with Christmas in 19th century America and was renamed Santa Claus or Saint Nick. In the Anglo-American tradition, this jovial fellow arrives on Christmas Eve on a sleigh pulled by reindeer, and lands on the roofs of houses. He then climbs down the chimney, leaves gifts for the children, and eats the food they leave for him. He spends the rest of the year making toys and keeping lists on the behaviour of the children.



Saint Nicholas

One belief in the United Kingdom, United States, and other countries passed down through the generations is the idea of lists of good children and bad children. Throughout the year, Santa supposedly adds names of children to either the good or bad list depending on their behaviour. When it gets closer to Christmas time, parents use the belief to encourage children to behave well. Those who are on the bad list receive a booby prize, such as a piece of coal or a switch with which their parents beat them, rather than presents.

The French equivalent of Santa, [Père Noël](#), evolved along similar lines, eventually adopting the Santa image. In some cultures Santa Claus is accompanied by Knecht Ruprecht, or Black Peter. In other versions, [elves](#) make the holiday toys. His wife is referred to as [Mrs. Claus](#). Many shopping malls in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia have a Santa Claus children can visit to ask for presents.

The current tradition in several Latin American countries (such as Venezuela) holds that while Santa makes the toys, he then gives them to the Baby Jesus, who is the one who actually delivers them to the children's homes. This story is meant to be a reconciliation between traditional religious beliefs and modern day globalization, most notably the iconography of Santa Claus imported from the United States.

In many countries, children leave empty containers for Santa to fill with small gifts such as toys, candy, or fruit. In the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada children hang a [Christmas stocking](#) by the fireplace on Christmas Eve because Santa is said to come down the chimney the night before Christmas to fill them. In other countries, children put their empty shoes out for Santa to fill on the night before Christmas, or for Saint Nicholas to fill on December 5, the eve of his saint's day. Family members and friends also bestow gifts on each other.

### Timing of gifts



Gifts under a Christmas tree. Credit: Kelvin Kay, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gifts\\_xmas.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gifts_xmas.jpg), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#) license.

In the Netherlands, [Saint Nicholas's](#) Day remains the principal day for gift giving while Christmas Day is a more religious holiday. In much of Germany, children put shoes out on window sills on the night of December 5, and find them filled with candy and small gifts the next morning. In Hungary, Santa Claus (Hungarian: Mikulás) or for non-religious people Father Winter (Hungarian: Télapó) is often accompanied by a black creature called Krampusz. The main day for gift giving in Germany is December 24, when gifts are brought by Santa Claus or are placed under the Christmas tree. It is the same in Hungary, except that the Christmas gifts are usually brought by little (child) Jesus (Hungarian: Jézuska), not by

Santa Claus. In Spain, gifts are brought by the magi on Epiphany (January 6), although the tradition of leaving gifts under the Christmas Tree on [Christmas Eve](#) (December 24) for the children to find and open the following morning has been widely adopted as well. In Poland, Santa Claus (Polish: Zwity MikoBaj) gives gifts on two occasions: on the night of December 5 (so that children find them on the morning of December 6) and on [Christmas Eve](#), (so that children find gifts that same day). In Finland, [Joulupukki](#) personally meets children and gives gifts on December 24. In Russia, *Grandfather Frost* brings presents on New Year's Eve, and these are opened on the same night. In Scotland, presents were traditionally given on [Hogmanay](#), which is New Year's Eve, but many Scots - especially since the establishment of Christmas Day as a legal holiday in 1967 - have adopted the English tradition of exchanging gifts on Christmas morning.

The song "[Twelve Days of Christmas](#)", celebrates an old English tradition of gifts each day from Christmas to Epiphany. In most of the world, Christmas gifts are given at night on Christmas Eve or in the morning of Christmas Day. Until recently, the British gave gifts to non-family members on [Boxing Day](#). Seriously.

## Declaration of Christmas Peace



Christmas tree in a Danish home, 2004. Credit: Malene Thyssen,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Juletr%C3%A6et.jpg>, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#) license

The Declaration of Christmas Peace has been a tradition in Finland from the Middle Ages every year, except in 1939 due to the war. The declaration takes place on the Old Great Square of Turku, Finland's official Christmas City and former capital, at noon on Christmas Eve. It is broadcast on Finnish radio and television.



The declaration ceremony begins with the hymn *Jumala omni linnamme* (a translation of Martin Luther's *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*) and continues as the Declaration of Christmas Peace is read from a parchment.

## Decorations

In the Western world, rolls of paper with secular or religious Christmas motifs are manufactured for the purpose of wrapping gifts. Common motifs include [Christmas trees](#), holly, poinsettias, mistletoe, swags, wreaths, [Santa Claus](#), the Nativity, angels, carolers, nutcrackers, toy soldiers, sleighs, sleds, drums, drummer boys, bows, reindeer, Christmas tree ornaments, gingerbread people and gingerbread houses, candies, stars, snowflakes, snowmen, snow babies, and penguins.

Christmas trees may be decorated with [lights](#) and [ornaments](#). The interior of a home may be decorated with [garlands](#) and evergreen foliage, particularly holly and mistletoe. In Australia, North and South America and to a lesser extent Europe, it is traditional to decorate the outside of houses with lights and sometimes with illuminated sleighs, snowmen, and other Christmas figures.

Since the 19th century, the poinsettia has been associated with Christmas. Other popular holiday plants include holly, mistletoe, red amaryllis, and Christmas cactus.

Municipalities often sponsor decorations as well. Christmas banners may be hung from street lights and Christmas trees placed in the town square. In the U.S., decorations once commonly included religious themes. This practice has led to many lawsuits, as some say it amounts to the government endorsing a religion. In 1984, the US Supreme Court ruled that a city-owned Christmas display, even one with a Nativity scene, does not violate the First Amendment.<sup>[19]</sup>

Although Christmas decorations, such as a tree, are considered secular in many parts of the world, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia bans such displays as symbols of Christianity.

## Social aspects and entertainment

In many countries, businesses, schools, and communities have Christmas parties and dances in the weeks before Christmas. Christmas pageants may include a retelling of the story of the birth of Christ. Groups may visit neighborhood homes to sing Christmas carols. Others do volunteer work or hold fundraising drives for charities.

On Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, a special meal of [Christmas dishes](#) is usually served. In some regions, particularly in Eastern Europe, these family feasts are preceded by a period of fasting. Candy and treats are also part of Christmas celebration in many countries.

Many people also send [Christmas cards](#) to their friends and family members. Many cards are also produced with messages such as "season's greetings" or "happy holidays", so as to including senders and recipients who may not celebrate Christmas.

Because of the focus on celebration, friends, and family, people who lead more isolated lives, or who have recently suffered losses, are more likely to suffer from depression during Christmas. This increases the demand for counseling services. It is widely believed that suicides and murders spike during the holiday season. However, the peak months for suicide

are May and June. Because of holiday celebrations, alcohol and drunk driving-related fatalities increase.

### Christmas carol media

- Deck the Halls
- Oh Holy Night
  - Angels We Have Heard On High

### Christmas in the arts and media

Main article: [Christmas in the media](#)



"Now it is Christmas again" (1907) by Carl Larsson.

Many fictional Christmas stories capture the spirit of Christmas in a modern-day fairy tale, often with heart-touching stories of a Christmas miracle. Several have become part of the Christmas tradition in their countries of origin.

Among the most popular are Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* and Charles Dickens's novel *A Christmas Carol*. *The Nutcracker* tells of a [nutcracker](#) that comes to life in a young German girl's dream. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is the tale of curmudgeonly miser Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge rejects compassion, philanthropy, and Christmas until he is visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future, who show him the consequences of his ways.

Some Scandinavian Christmas stories are less cheery than Dickens's. In H. C. Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*, a destitute little slum girl walks barefoot through snow-covered streets on Christmas Eve, trying in vain to sell her matches, and peeking in at the celebrations in the homes of the more fortunate. She dares not go home because her father is drunk. Unlike the principals of Anglophone Christmas lore, she meets a tragic end.

In 1881, the Swedish magazine *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* published Viktor Rydberg's poem *Tomten* featuring the first painting by Jenny Nyström of the traditional Swedish mythical character [tomte](#), which she turned into the friendly white-bearded figure and associated with Christmas.

Many Christmas stories have been popularized as movies and TV specials. Since the 1980s, many video editions are sold and resold every year during the holiday season. A notable example is the film *It's a Wonderful Life*, which turns the theme of *A Christmas Carol* on its head. Its hero, George Bailey, is a businessman who sacrificed his dreams to help his

community. On [Christmas Eve](#), a guardian angel finds him in despair and prevents him from committing suicide by magically showing him how much he meant to the world around him. Perhaps the most famous animated production is A Charlie Brown Christmas wherein Charlie Brown tries to address his feelings of dissatisfaction with the holidays by trying to find a deeper meaning in them. The humorous A Christmas Story (1983) has become a holiday classic.

A few true stories have also become enduring Christmas tales themselves. The story behind the Christmas carol Silent Night and the story Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus is among the most well-known of these.

Radio and television programs aggressively pursue entertainment and ratings through their cultivation of Christmas themes. Radio stations broadcast [Christmas carols](#) and [Christmas songs](#), including classical music such as the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's Messiah. Among other classical pieces inspired by Christmas are the Nutcracker Suite, adapted from Tchaikovsky's ballet score, and Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio (BWV 248). Television networks add Christmas themes to their standard programming, run traditional holiday movies, and produce a variety of Christmas specials.

## Economics of Christmas

Christmas is typically the largest annual stimulus for many nations. Sales increase dramatically in almost all retail areas and shops introduce new products as people purchase gifts, decorations, and supplies. In the U.S., the Christmas shopping season now begins on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. The economic impact of Christmas continues after the holiday. During Christmas sales and New Year's sales, stores sell off excess inventories.

More businesses and stores close on Christmas Day than any other day of the year. In the United Kingdom, the [Christmas Day \(Trading\) Act 2004](#) prevents all large shops from trading on Christmas Day.

Many Christians, as well as anti-consumerists, decry the commercialization of Christmas. They accuse the Christmas season of being dominated by money and greed at the expense of the holiday's more important values. Frustrations over these issues and others can lead to a rise in Christmastime social problems. Detractors of this school of thought argue that the idea of a grand winter holiday existed in our society long before Christianity.

Most economists agree, however, that Christmas produces a deadweight loss under orthodox microeconomic theory, due to the surge in gift-giving. This loss is calculated as the difference between what the gift giver spent on the item and what the gift receiver would have paid for the item. It is estimated that in 2001 Christmas resulted in a \$4 billion deadweight loss in the U.S. alone.<sup>[20][21]</sup> Because of complicating factors, this analysis is sometimes used to discuss possible flaws in current microeconomic theory.

In North America, film studios release many high-budget movies in the holiday season, including Christmas films, fantasy movies or high-tone dramas with rich production values. This helps the studio capture holiday crowds and position themselves for the Academy Awards. Christmas is the most lucrative season for the industry aside from summer. Christmas-specific movies generally open in late November or early December as their themes and images are not nearly as popular once the season is over. Home video release is often delayed until the following Christmas season.

## See also

- [Christmas worldwide](#)
- [American Christmas traditions](#)
- [Biblical Magi](#)
- [Boxing Day](#)
- [Carols by Candlelight](#)
- [Christmas carol](#)
- [Christmas cracker](#)
- [Christmas movie](#)
- [Christmas music](#)
- [Christmas season](#)
- [Christmas Sunday](#)
- [Christmas tree](#)
- [Epiphany \(Christian\)](#)
- [Festive ecology](#)
- [German Christmas traditions](#)
- [List of Christmas dishes](#)
- [Nativity scene](#)
- Saturnalia
- [Twelfth Night \(holiday\)](#)
- [Twelve Days of Christmas](#)
  - [Twelve Holy Days](#)

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## Christmas Day (Trading) Act 2004

The **Christmas Day (Trading) Act 2004** is an Act of Parliament of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that prevents shops over 280 m<sup>2</sup>/3,000 sq ft from opening on [Christmas Day](#). The Act only applies in England and Wales. Shops smaller than the limit are not affected.

The Act was introduced to the House of Commons by Kevan Jones, MP for North Durham as a Private Member's Bill on 7 January, 2004. The Act was passed by both the Commons and the House of Lords, and received Royal Assent on 28 October, coming into force on 9 December 2004.

The aim of the Act was to keep Christmas Day a "special" day, whereby all major retailers would be closed. Although it was traditional for major retailers to close on the 25 December, some retailers, such as Woolworths began to open some stores in the late 1990s. Both religious groups and shop worker unions were against the idea of Christmas openings, leading to pressure on Government to pass legislation to prevent the practice.

## Christmas Seal

**Christmas Seals** are adhesive labels placed on envelopes during the [Christmas](#) season to raise funds and awareness for tuberculosis programs.

In 1904, Einar Holboell, a Danish postal clerk developed the idea of a seal on envelopes during Christmas to raise money for tuberculosis. The plan was approved by the Postmaster and the King of Denmark, and the first seal bore the likeness of the Queen and the word *Julen* (Christmas). Over 4 million were sold in the first year.

They were introduced to the United States by Emily Bissell in 1907, after she had read about the program in an article by Danish-born Jacob Riis, a muckraking journalist and photographer. Bissell hoped to raise money for a sanitarium on the Brandywine River in Delaware.

It grew to a national program in 1908 by the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis (NASPT) and the American National Red Cross. The seals were sold at post offices, initially in Delaware at 1 cent each. Net proceeds from the sales would be divided equally between the two organizations. By 1920, the Red Cross withdrew from the arrangement and sales were conducted exclusively by the NASPT, then known as the National Tuberculosis Association (NTA). To reflect the expanding scope of the organization's goals, the name was changed to the National Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association in the late 1960's. The NTRDA became the American Lung Association in 1973, though the 1974 seals continue to show the NTRDA inscription on the sheet margin.

Today the Christmas Seals benefit the American Lung Association and other lung related issues. Tuberculosis was declining, but recently has been on the rise. TB is still the most common major infectious disease in the world.

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## Christmas creep

**Christmas creep** is the commercial phenomenon of merchants and retailers exploiting the commercialized status of [Christmas](#) (see [Christmas season](#)) earlier and earlier every year. It is most often attributed to the desire of many merchants to take advantage of particularly heavy holiday-related shopping well before [Black Friday](#).

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## Christmas in the media

Christmas themes have long been an inspiration to artists, writers, and weavers of folklore. Moviemakers have picked up on this wealth of material, with both adaptations of literary classics and new stories. Radio and television have also aggressively pursued entertainment and ratings through their cultivation of Christmas themes.

### Christmas movies and videos

Many Christmas stories have been adapted to movies and TV specials, and have been broadcast and repeated many times on TV. Since the popularization of home video in the 1980s, their many editions are sold and re-sold every year during the holiday shopping season. Notable examples are the film *It's a Wonderful Life*, and the similarly themed film versions of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge is an elderly miser who is visited by ghosts and learns the errors of his ways. The hero of the former, *George Bailey*, is a businessman who sacrificed his dreams to help his community. On Christmas Eve, a



guardian angel finds him in despair and prevents him from committing suicide, by magically showing him how much he meant to the world around him.

A few true stories have become enduring Christmas tales themselves. The story behind the Christmas carol "Silent Night" and the story of "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" are among the most well-known of these true tales of Christmas.

In North America, the holiday movie season often includes release of studios' most prestigious pictures, in an effort both to capture holiday crowds and to position themselves for Oscar consideration. Next to summer, this is the second-most lucrative season for the industry. Christmas movies generally open no later than Thanksgiving, as their themes are not so popular once the season is over.

## **Television and Christmas**

TV programming in the United Kingdom also includes an expanding holiday season. Perhaps aiming for the establishment of new Christmas institutions are the UK's seasonal specials, most notably with shows like *Morecambe and Wise*, *The Two Ronnies*, *Only Fools and Horses* and *Top of the Pops*. The animated tale *The Snowman* has been screened for many years during the Christmas period, and a new story, *The Bear*, by the same artist and company, is usually broadcast around the same time. In addition, HM Queen Elizabeth II annually broadcasts a 10-minute speech on Christmas Day at 3 p.m., charting her views of the past year and giving her own reflections and advice.

In the United States, most family-oriented TV series produce a Christmas special. Stand-alone Christmas specials are also popular, from newly created animated shorts and movies to repeats of those that were popular in previous years, such as *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Some local affiliates provide the Yule Log, a block of time on Christmas morning showing footage of a fireplace, coupled with popular Christmas music. Many long-running American and UK soap operas have Christmas specials, usually involving a dramatic storyline developed over several weeks which culminates at Christmas. Often these stories are tragic, involving a death, divorce, a dramatic revelation or similar event.

## **Christmas on the radio**

Many radio stations begin to add [Christmas songs](#) to their rotation in late November, and often switch to all-Christmas programming for December 25th. Some do for part of or all of December 24th as well. A few stations switch to all-Christmas music for the entire season (some beginning as early as mid-November); In Detroit, 100.3 WNIC in 2005 started Christmas music day and night on midnight of October 31 because programmers believed that at least some listeners who are attracted by the Christmas music will remain loyal listeners when the station reverts to its standard format on Boxing Day. Radio stations also broadcast classical music, such as the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's *Messiah*. Among other classical pieces inspired by Christmas are the *Nutcracker Suite*, adapted from Tchaikovsky's ballet score, and Johann Sebastian Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248). Some radio stations play Christmas music commercial-free the entire day on Christmas Day, others on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The UK music industry features the battle of the bands and artists to make it to the 'Christmas No. 1' spot, recognised on the first Sunday before, or on, Christmas Day. Many of these songs are festive, while others are novelty songs that remain but briefly at the top of the chart. Gospel singer Cliff Richard is a fixture of Christmas charts, appearing nearly every year, and subsequently being mocked for doing so.

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## Christmas season

The **Christmas season** is a phrase that covers the time when two interconnected periods of celebration are held.

In many countries, Christmas season refers to the period of the year approaching [Christmas](#) when businesses (particularly those who sell and manufacture things that could be given as gifts) prepare for the massive buying rush that the holiday generates. Although there is no official beginning to the Christmas season, some people consider this period to last between the day after Thanksgiving ([Black Friday](#)) and the Sunday after New Year's Day. In some countries it is marked by annual Christmas parades and the arrival of [Santa Claus](#) such as at the end of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in the U.S. The day after Thanksgiving, retailers generally have sales and special events encouraging people to start buying their gifts. Others simply consider it the month of December.

In North America, the Christmas season is also punctuated by continued screenings of theme-based movies (such as *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Miracle on 34th Street*) and television specials (such as *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*). The season continues through the New Year's weekend, with its college football bowl games and more parades.

Christmas season is also known as **Christmastide**, one of six seasons of the year in the liturgical year of some Christian churches; namely, the period which runs from [Christmas Day](#) to January 6, the start of the octave of [Epiphany](#). This period is also commonly known as **the Twelve days of Christmas**, as referred to in the [Christmas carol](#) "[Twelve Days of Christmas](#)" or **Yuletide** as in "Deck the Halls". During the season various festivities are traditionally enjoyed and buildings decorated. In some countries, by superstition it is bad luck to leave the decorations up after [Twelfth Night](#).

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Christmas season begins at the Christmas Vigil Mass and runs until the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, which falls on the Sunday after Epiphany (and on Jan. 13 in the pre-Vatican II calendar).

### See also

- [Christmas](#)
- [Winterval](#)

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## Festive ecology



**Festive ecology** explores the relationships between the symbolism and the ecology of the plants, fungi and animals associated with cultural events such as festivals, processions and special occasions. Examples of topics are given below.

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- [1 Christmas](#)
- [2 Dressing the Arbor Tree, Aston-on-Clun, Shropshire, England](#)
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## Christmas

The plants traditionally associated with [Christmas](#) – holly, ivy, mistletoe, common yew - have had special roles in earlier religions and past cultures. Some early religions in Europe had midwinter festivals to celebrate the return of the sun from the shortest day. In the 4th and 5th centuries, 25 December was gradually adopted as the date for Christmas in Europe in order to superimpose on the existing mid-winter festivals. The winter solstice, on what is now 17 December, was the start of the Roman festival of Saturnalia. This was a week of public feasting, dancing, singing and gambling. Houses were decorated with evergreens and bunches of holly were given as tokens of friendship. When this festival was absorbed into the Christian calendar, holly and the other evergreens were absorbed as well.

Holly is palatable to livestock despite its spines and was extensively used as a winter fodder for livestock in medieval times in England and Wales, particularly in Cumbria, the Pennines and the Welsh borders.<sup>[1]</sup> Hay and grains for wintering stock would often have run short in these upland areas. This would mean that the livestock would eventually have to be slaughtered, causing real problems to medieval economies in the following years. Thus, a supply of fresh browse would have been extremely valuable. Written records of payments and agreements involving the use of holly for livestock cover a wide period from the late 12th century to the mid-18th century, by which time the practice had been largely abandoned.<sup>[1]</sup> An early reference to the practice occurs in “The Dream of Rhonabwy”, a Welsh story from the Mabinogion, a remarkable collection of medieval literature.<sup>[2]</sup> Written before the 14th century, The Dream of Rhonabwy refers to the mid-12th century in Powys. The floor of the old black house of Heilyn Goch is described as being covered in the urine and dung of cows together with branches of holly whose tips had been eaten by the cattle.

Ivy was used in garlands by the ancient Greeks and the Romans for religious ceremonies and for celebrating at other, more secular, occasions. It was strongly associated with Bacchus (Dionysus), the Greco-Roman god of wine. Since Roman times, ivy has been associated with wine and wine-making. Branches of evergreen ivy tied to a pole was often used as the “sign of the bush” indicating a place where wine or alcohol was for sale. Hence, the proverb “Good wine needs no bush” meaning that it is not necessary to advertise well-made goods. Ivy is less commonly seen in houses in Britain at Christmas compared to holly and mistletoe and it may be that established religions opposed its use in Christmas wreaths because of its association with drunkenness.

Mistletoe is an evergreen plant well-known for its association with oak trees and Druids first documented by Pliny the Elder who wrote about the ceremonies of the Celtic Druids in Gaul in his *Naturalis Historia*.<sup>[3]</sup> These Druids held the oak in particular veneration, used oak leaves in their ceremonies, and regarded anything growing on oak trees as having been sent from heaven. On the rare occasions when mistletoe was found growing on an oak, it would be gathered with great ceremony. A priest in white clothing would cut the mistletoe with a golden sickle and allow it to fall onto a white cloak; two white bulls would then be sacrificed. According to Pliny, it was believed that mistletoe in a drink would make any barren animal fertile and that it was a remedy for all poisons. Special powers are attributed to mistletoe by a wide range of cultures, both within Europe and further afield.<sup>[4]</sup> The use of mistletoe as an all-heal and a cure for barrenness is reputed to have a very ancient history.<sup>[5]</sup> The link between mistletoe and fertility persists to this day in Britain in the tradition of kissing underneath bunches of mistletoe at Christmas. In the early 19th century, it was traditional for each man who kissed under the mistletoe to remove one berry. Once all the berries are gone, so has the potency.

Yew trees continually put out new stems which coalesce with the existing trunk resulting in trees of great age. The merging of old and decaying wood with vibrant young shoots has led to the yew being traditionally associated with reincarnation and immortality.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **Dressing the Arbor Tree, Aston-on-Clun, Shropshire, England**

The custom of dressing the Arbor tree – a black poplar growing in Aston-on-Clun in south Shropshire - with flags on flagpoles every 29th May is unique in Britain.<sup>[7]</sup> New flags are attached to wooden flagpoles on the Arbor tree which remain throughout the year. Accounts of other traditional customs on 29 May are usually linked to Royal Oak Day (Oak Apple Day) and include the surviving customs of Grovely Rights at Great Wishford (Wiltshire) and Garland King Day at Castleton (Derbyshire).

The Arbor tree is a male black poplar tree growing beside a stream at a place where four roads meet. Written records of the Arbor tree only extend back to 1898, but the tradition of dressing the tree is reputed to date back to a local wedding in 1786. The custom has developed and acquired new meanings, particularly since the 1955 when a pageant was devised. The pageant and the celebrations associated with the tree dressing are evolving in response to those living in the local community as well as to the external recognition now accorded to this unique tradition.

The present black poplar grew from a rooted cutting taken from the old tree which was said to be at least 300 years old when it collapsed in 1995 and had been repeatedly pollarded. Black poplar is an extremely unusual tree to be associated with notable events or traditions, which are more likely to involve pedunculate oak, sessile oak, common yew or hawthorn (*Crataegus*).

The black poplar (*Populus nigra* var. *betulifolia*) is an uncommon native tree in Britain. Black poplars are associated with alluvial soils in river valleys and floodplains generally south of a line from the River Mersey to the estuary of the Humber with particular concentrations across the Midlands from the Welsh Marches to East Anglia and notably in the Vale of Aylesbury (Aylesbury Vale).<sup>[8]</sup> A male clone (cloning) was much planted in the suburbs of Manchester in the late 18th century as it grew well in the polluted atmosphere

and it became known as the 'Manchester poplar'. Growing to a height of some 30 metres, the bark of the black poplar is distinctively ridged and furrowed and has characteristic large burrs or bosses. When mature, the tree forms a huge dome of massive spreading branches which arch outwards. This spreading habit is dramatically different from the elongated shape of the Lombardy poplar (*Populus nigra* 'Italica') which, surprisingly, is a cultivated variety of the black poplar that was imported to Essex from Turin in 1758 and widely planted because of its unusual shape. The black poplar is also a different species from the more widespread black Italian poplar (*Populus x euramericana* or *Populus x canadensis*) which is a hybrid between the black poplar and the North American eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*).

Poplars are unusual in that there are separate male and female trees. Male black poplars are far more numerous than female trees in Britain and seedlings are, therefore, very rare.<sup>[9]</sup> Regrowth occurs from the branches or trunk of fallen trees which root into the underlying soil. Growing in river valleys and floodplains, the trees can be uprooted by floods and grow again in a new location.

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## Happy Holiday(s)

**Happy Holidays** is a seasonal greeting common in the United States and Canada, and is typically used during the holiday season. "Holiday" is derived from Middle English *holidai* meaning "holy day"<sup>[1]</sup>. It is used as an inclusive greeting during the holiday season around [Christmas](#) to those who do not celebrate it, but instead other winter holidays like Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.

In the United States, it can have several variations and meanings:

- As "Happy Holiday," an English translation of the Hebrew *Hag Sameach* greeting on Passover, Sukkot and Shavuot
- As "Happy Holiday," a substitution for "[Merry Christmas](#)"
- As "Happy Holidays," a collective wish for the period encompassing Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year
- As "Happy Holidays," an inclusive wish for those who celebrate other winter religious holidays, such as Hanukkah, or Winter Solstice
- As "Happy Holidays," a secular alternative for those who do not celebrate any religious holidays during the season

In the United States, "Happy Holidays" (along with the similarly generalized "Season's Greetings") has become the common greeting in the public sphere within the past decade, such as department stores, public schools and greeting cards.

Advocates of the phrase view it as an inclusive and inoffensive phrase that does not give precedence to one religion or occasion. Critics view it as an insipid alternative to "Merry Christmas," and view it as diminishing the role of Christianity in Christmas, or part of an alleged secular "War on Christmas". Opposition to the phrase is not limited to Christians; many non-religious people and atheists also roundly denounce the phrase as an example of "political correctness gone mad".

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## Nativity Fast

The **Nativity Fast**, practiced by the Eastern Orthodox Church and other churches such as the Eastern Catholic churches, is believed to enable participants to draw closer to God by denying the body of worldly pleasure in preparation for celebration of the birth (or Nativity) of Jesus, which is held on December 25 (Julian Calendar). Although the fast influences the body, the emphasis is placed on the spiritual facet of the fast rather than physical deprivation. Sometimes the fast is called the Philippian fast, as it traditionally follows the Feast of St. Philip the Apostle on November 14.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the fast goes from November 15 to December 24 and is traditionally from red meat, poultry, meat products, eggs, dairy products, fish, oil, and wine; where fish is allowed on Saturdays and Sundays, and oil and wine are allowed on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There has been some ambiguity about the restriction of fish, whether it means the allowance of invertebrate fish or all fish. More detailed guidelines vary, but the rules strictly state that from the 20th of December to the 24th of December, no fish may be eaten. On December 25, the Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ to Theophany Eve begins, which declares the time period from December 25 to January 4 fast-free.

Some churches have abbreviated the fast to start on December 10, following the Feast of the Conception of Saint Anne.

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## Nine Lessons and Carols

**The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols** is a format of Christian worship service celebrating the birth of Jesus and traditionally followed at [Christmas](#). The story of the fall of man, the promise of the Messiah, and the birth of Jesus is told in nine short [Bible](#) readings, interspersed with the singing of [Christmas carols](#) and hymns.

The format was based on an Order drawn up by E.W. Benson, later Archbishop of Canterbury, for Christmas Eve 1880 in Truro. It has since been adapted and used by other churches all over the world. In the UK, the service has become the standard format for schools' Christmas carol services.

The most famous version is broadcast annually from King's College, Cambridge on [Christmas Eve](#) featuring carols by the famous Choir.

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- [1 King's College, Cambridge](#)
- [2 Order of Service](#)
- [3 External link](#)

## King's College, Cambridge

The first Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in King's College, Cambridge was conceived by Eric Milner-White and held on [Christmas Eve](#) in 1918. The format did not differ substantially from the one known today. The service was first broadcast on the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1928, and since the early 1930s has been broadcast live to many parts of the world on the BBC Overseas Service, as well as domestically on the Radio 4. It is estimated that each year there are millions of listeners worldwide. There is also a television broadcast in the UK (on BBC channels Two and Four), although that is pre-recorded in early or mid-December.

The service traditionally begins with the hymn *Once in Royal David's City*, with the first verse sung unaccompanied by a solo boy chorister, and ends with the hymn *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. The lessons are read by representatives of the college and of the City of Cambridge. The singing is divided into "carols", which are sung by the choir, and "hymns", sung by choir and congregation. Since 1982 the current Director of Music, Stephen Cleobury, has commissioned a new carol on behalf of the College for the Choir.

## Order of Service

The Order of Service at King's College is always the same—the only thing that changes are which carols the choir sings, although some music is repeated from year to year. The following is from the service in 2005.

- Organ Prelude  
Processional Hymn: *Once in Royal David's City*  
Bidding Prayer  
Carol: "What sweeter music" John Rutter  
First Lesson from Genesis 3  
Carol: *Remember, O thou man* Thomas Ravenscroft

Carol: Adam lay ybounden Boris Ord  
Second Lesson from Genesis 22  
Anthem: God so loved the world John Stainer  
Carol: In dulci jubilo arr. Robert Lucas de Pearsall  
Third Lesson from Isaiah 9  
Carol: Sussex Carol arr. Phillip Ledger  
Hymn: Unto us is born a son  
Fourth Lesson from Isaiah 11  
Carol: A tender shoot Otto Goldschmidt  
Carol: A spotless rose Herbert Howells  
Fifth Lesson from Luke 1  
Carol: Edi beo thu, Heuene Quene 13th century traditional  
Carol: Benedicamus Domino Peter Warlock  
Sixth Lesson from Luke 2  
Carol: Sweet was the song the Virgin sang Richard Blackford  
Carol: Tomorrow shall be my dancing day John Gardner  
Seventh Lesson from Luke 2  
Carol: Away in a manger John Tavener  
Hymn: While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
Eighth Lesson from Matthew 2  
Carol: Riu, riu, Chiu Mateo Fletcher the elder  
Carol: Be merry Stephen Cleobury  
Ninth Lesson from John 1  
Chorale: Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her Johann Sebastian Bach  
Hymn: O Come, All Ye Faithful  
Collect & Blessing  
Hymn: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing  
Organ Postlude

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# Noel

**Noël** is a word of French origin referring either to the [Christmas](#) celebration or a [Christmas carol](#). It is derived from the Latin *(dies) natalis*, referring to the Nativity of Christ.

## See also

- Noel
- [Noël The Mentalist](#)

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# SantaCon

SantaCon is a mass gathering of people dressed in cheap [Santa Claus](#) costumes, performing publicly on streets and in bars. The focus is on spontaneity, creativity, and the improvisational nature of human interaction while having a good time. Various known as **Santarchy**, **Santa Rampages** and **the Red Menace**, SantaCon events are noted for bawdy and harmless behavior, including the singing of naughty [Christmas](#) carols, and the giving of gifts. Some participants see SantaCon as a postmodern revival of Saturnalia, while others see the event as a precursor of the flash mob.

In 1994, the Cacophony Society staged the first **SantaCon** in San Francisco. Influenced by the surrealist movement, Discordianism, and other subversive art currents, the Cacophonists decided to celebrate the Yule season in a distinctly anti-commercial manner, by mixing guerrilla street theatre, pranksterism, and public intoxication. In subsequent years, SantaCon evolved, spawning many different versions of the event throughout the world.

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- [1 Santarchy around the world](#)
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## Santarchy around the world

Local Cacophony Societies have staged SantaCons in Los Angeles, Portland, New York, Seattle, Washington DC, Denver, Austin Texas, Vancouver, London, Tokyo, and McMurdo Station in Antarctica. By 2003, the idea had spread to almost 30 cities in four countries. In



2004, nearly 500 people participated in SantaCon in New York City, and, in 2005, enough Santas participated in the Washington DC Santarchy to circle the Washington Monument.

Santa events are now planned and put on by a many groups for a variety of purposes. Some groups participate only for a night out bar hopping, while others parade through the cities in the daytime singing Christmas Carols, giving out candy and gifts to children, and raising money for charity.

## **Santarchy and the law**

Most participants of Santarchy adhere to a set of **Santa's Suggestions**. Most importantly, it includes "not messing with children, police, security, or Santa". Despite this, in 2005, a more violent version of the event occurred when on December 18, participants in Auckland, New Zealand, proceeded to start a small riot, with such criminal acts as looting stores, throwing bottles at passing cars, and assaulting security guards. At least two bystanders were lightly injured and three arrests were made. Alex Dyer, spokesman for the group, stated that Santarchy in Auckland was part of a worldwide phenomenon designed to protest against the commercialization of Christmas.

An update on the recent "Bad Santa" behavior is available on the website [santarchy.com](http://santarchy.com). The New Zealand group claims the media exaggerated the incident and many participants of other SantaCon and Santarchy events were very shocked and disappointed by the incident. Most participants follow the set of "Santa's Suggestions" and do not break any laws. Unlike the statement from Alex Dyer, most santa groups are not protesting anything; the only purpose is to have fun and spread holiday cheer.

Another incident occurred earlier in the month on December 5, when a horde of Santas riding bicycles into traffic in Tulsa, Oklahoma during morning rush hour. Eyewitness, police scanner, and radio traffic reports indicate Santas were spotted across Tulsa. The Tulsa *Indy Gazetteer* later reported that at least one of the Santas was later apprehended and charged with violations of city ordinances.

Despite these stories, most SantaCon events still maintain Christmas cheer. According to Reuters News, a Santa in Great Britain in 2005 paid off parking tickets. The Santa left money on the windshields of drivers who have received parking tickets with the message "Don't let this ticket spoil your Christmas, Here's £30 to pay it off. Merry Christmas - Parking Ticket Santa."

## **In popular culture**

- The Santa Rampage is mentioned in Chuck Palahniuk's book *Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon* and in his short story "My Life as a Dog" (featured in the book *Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories*).
- The parody artist Bob Rivers touched on the idea of Santarchy in his song "There's Another Santa Claus," a parody of "Here Comes Santa Claus". Lyrics include:

*"That Christmas cheer / Smells a lot like beer / On Santa Claus' account tonight" and "Just saw Santa Claus / Just saw Santa Claus / Just gave a Santa Claus change / Drove downtown and a bell-ringing Santa Claus / Hit me up again!"*



## Secret Santa

**Secret Santa**, **Kris Kindle** or **Kris Kringle** is a [Christmas](#) ritual involving a group of people exchanging anonymous gifts. The ritual is known as Secret Santa in the United States and Australia but Kris Kindle in Great Britain and Ireland. All of these names derive from traditional Christmas gift-bringers: the US version is named for [Santa Claus](#) while *Kris Kindle* and *Kris Kringle* are English corruptions of the name of the German gift-bringer [Christkind](#) (in Britain the traditional gift-bringer is [Father Christmas](#)). The term *Secret Santa* can refer to the ritual itself, or any of the people participating. The purpose of Secret Santa is to restrict gift-giving. Because of this, it is often practiced in workplaces, or amongst large families. Recently the name **Secret Snowflake** has been showing up as a secular term for the same practice.

Participation is usually voluntary, especially in workplace settings.

### A typical Secret Santa

Participants' names are placed in a hat, and each person draws a name for whom they are to buy a gift. Along with name submission, each participant may also submit a short wishlist of items from which the gift-giver can choose. There is often a limit to how much can be spent on the present. Presents are then exchanged anonymously.

There is usually a gift-giving occasion, where all the presents are placed on a table, marked with the name of the receiver but not the giver. Sometimes the gift-giver will personally give the recipient the present, thereby revealing their identity. Some groups may choose to donate the money they saved on presents to charity.

Sites such as [Secret-Gift.com](#), [SecretSanta.com](#) and [Elfster](#) provide a modern twist allowing organizers and participants to manage the draw, wishlists and exchange on line. SecretSanta.com does the draw electronically so even the organizer does not know who their Secret Santa is.

### Variation: Thieving Secret Santa

In this version, participants (players) bring one gift each which is potentially suitable or interesting to any of the other participants. The gifts should be wrapped in such a way as to disguise their nature. Ideally, the provider of each gift should not be disclosed when setting up the game. Players take turns, and can either open a new gift, or steal a previously opened gift. This game is also known as the White elephant gift exchange.

### References in popular culture

- The Secret Santa gift exchange was featured on the Christmas special episode of *The Office* (UK) airing December 27, 2003.
- It also appeared in the December 6, 2005 episode of *The Office* (US), titled "Christmas Party". It began in the traditional form, but partway through became a "Yankee Swap"

- The December 2, 2005 episode of Monk (TV series) featured a murderous version of the gift exchange, in an episode titled "Mr. Monk and the Secret Santa"

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## Secularization of Christmas

The **secularization of Christmas** and the *War on Christmas* refer to the notion that the [Christmas](#) holiday is under attack from a general secular trend or from persons and/or organizations with a deliberate or unconscious anti-Christian agenda.

While different versions of this argument have existed for two centuries, there are significant differences between them. Historically, traditional Christians have objected to including secular or pagan symbols into Christmas celebrations. The current debate in the United States revolves around a claim that Christmas is being censored. A symbolic issue is the replacement of the greeting "Merry Christmas" with generic equivalents such as "[Happy Holidays](#)". As an example, Don Feder, president of *Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation*, complains about a "politically correct purging of Christmas from our culture." [\[1\]](#)

The term "War on Christmas" was first coined by Peter Brimelow in the December 12, 1999 column at VDARE.com. It is now widely used, even by commentators who deny that any such thing exists.

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### Incorporating secular or pagan elements into Christmas

#### Protestantism

Prior to the Victorian era, Christmas was primarily a religious holiday, and its importance was often considered secondary to [Epiphany](#) and [Easter](#). As was the case with other Christian holidays, it borrowed elements from pagan culture, including the Advent period, gift giving, yule logs, Christmas trees, decorations such as candles, holly, and mistletoe. During the various Protestant reformations, these (really or supposedly) paganizing elements were a source of controversy. Some sects, such as the Puritans, rejected Christmas as an entirely pagan holiday. Others rejected certain aspects of Christmas as paganizing, but wanted to

retain the "essence" of the holiday as a celebration of the Christ's birth. This tension put in motion an ongoing debate about the proper observance of Christmas.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 19th century

According to historian Ronald Hutton, the current state of observance of Christmas is largely the result of a mid-Victorian revival of the holiday spearheaded by Charles Dickens, who in *A Christmas Carol* sought to construct Christmas as a family-centered festival of generosity, in contrast to the prior, community and church centered observations whose observance slowly dwindled in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The holiday, remade as a family centered rather than community centered festival, carried its own set of contradictions: the practice of gift-giving raised the possibility of commercial cooptation, and the familial rather than community focus of the holiday was not particularly conducive to communal religious observance.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Early 20th century

In the early twentieth century, Christian writers such as C. S. Lewis had already noted a distinct split between the religious and secular observance of Christmas. In *Xmas and Christmas: A Lost Chapter from Herodotus*, Lewis gives a satire of the observance of two simultaneous holidays in "Niatirb" (Britain backwards) from the supposed view of the Greek historian and traveller. One, "Exmas", is observed by a flurry of compulsory commercial activity and expensive indulgence in alcoholic beverages. The other, "Crissmas," is observed in Niatirb's temples. Lewis's narrator asks a priest "why they kept Crissmas on the same day as Exmas?" He receives the reply:

*"It is not lawful, O Stranger, for us to change the date of Crissmas, but would that Zeus would put it into the minds of the Niatirbians to keep Exmas at some other time or not to keep it at all. For Exmas and the Rush distract the minds even of the few from sacred things. And we indeed are glad that men should make merry at Crissmas; but in Exmas there is no merriment left." And when I asked him why they endured the Rush, he replied, "It is, O Stranger, a racket. . ."*<sup>[3]</sup>

The December 1957 *News and Views* published by the Church League of America, an organization co-founded in 1937 by George Washington Robnett<sup>[2]</sup> attacked the use of [Xmas](#) in an article titled "X=The Unknown Quantity." The claims were picked up later by Gerald L.K. Smith who in December 1966 claimed that Xmas was a "blasphemous omission of the name of Christ" and that "'X' is referred to as being symbolical of the unknown quantity." Smith further argued that Jews introduced [Santa Claus](#) to suppress the New Testament accounts of Jesus, and that the United Nations at the behest of "world Jewry" had "outlawed the name of Christ."<sup>[3]</sup> Such claims are made in the face of documented centuries-long history of use of  $\chi$  (actually a chi) as an abbreviation for "Christ" ( $\chi$  <sup>1</sup>  $\tilde{\alpha}$   $\tilde{\alpha}$   $\tilde{\alpha}$   $\tilde{\alpha}$ ).

Christmas observances (at least the overtly religious kinds) were banned in the Soviet Union and under certain other Communist regimes, and played down in all of them. Certain Christian sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and some fundamentalist churches, continued to reject the holiday as well, citing its pagan and/or Roman Catholic origins.

## Claims of Christmas censorship

### Contemporary United States

In the year 2000 and subsequently, the analysis of a "War on Christmas" became a prominent piece of conservative cultural criticism.

The phrase "Season's Greetings," as opposed to "Merry Christmas," has become a particular concern to many people. The phrase "Season's Greetings" is used on many postcards (as, for example, those sent out by the American Library Association), and by door clerks at Wal-Mart and other major stores. Don Feder, president of Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation stresses that it should be okay to say "Merry Christmas", and complained about "politically correct purging of Christmas from our culture." Rabbi Daniel Lapin believes that "saying Merry Christmas is NOT Offensive" and complains that "We see obsequious regard for faiths like Judaism and even Islam, while Christianity is treated with contempt". Further, Lapin says that "Nationwide, Christmas Nativity scenes are banned from city halls and shopping malls but Chanukah menorahs are permitted. (They are only cultural symbols, not religious, you see.)" and concludes that "Religious Freedom is for Everyone - Not Just Minorities"

The idea of a war on Christmas in America gained prominence following extensive coverage on the Fox News Channel. The channel's commentators Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity first spoke of a "war on Christmas" in the months leading up to the 2004 holiday season, and picked up the topic again in late 2005. In particular, they cited certain school decisions and municipal codes that were supposed to single out Christmas observances for special restriction.

In several cases, the news items mentioned on Fox were denied by the persons involved. For example, O'Reilly said that the township of Saginaw, Michigan, "opposes red and green clothing on anyone." The town supervisor responded that "O'Reilly's comments are flat-out not true...the township hall has red and green Christmas lights adorning the building at night." <sup>matters</sup> Nevertheless, these reports bolstered a widespread popular sentiment that Christmas was being attacked by the political left. This was, and is, widely discussed on the Internet, especially in the blogosphere. A Fox News / Opinion Dynamics poll for November 29–30, 2005 found that 42% of respondents believe that "there is a War on Christmas in the US today," with 48% in disagreement. Media Matters for America, a watchdog group critical of conservative media, reported that from Monday, November 28, to Friday, December 2, Fox News aired 58 different reports, interviews, and debates about the War on Christmas. [8] Many print and television media outlets are skeptical, calling it a conspiracy theory or a deliberate attempt to further a conservative Christian agenda. [\[1\]](#) [\[31\]](#)

Regarding the phrase "Season's Greetings," as opposed to "Merry Christmas," O'Reilly argued: "Every company in America should be on their knees thanking Jesus for being born. Without Christmas, most American businesses would be far less profitable," O'Reilly said on a Fox News program. "More than enough reason for business to be screaming 'Merry Christmas'." Critics, however, point out that attempting to include non-Christians in Christmas by generalizing the holiday is a wholly capitalistic method of increasing profits — the more people affected by marketing, the more people will come out and purchase. [\[7\]](#)

While the controversy over the phrase "Season's Greetings" strongly echoes Robnett's concern about the phrase "Xmas," the "War on Christmas" idea, however, differs from earlier discussions of the secularization of Christmas in two important regards. First, it treats many of the (really or supposedly) paganizing elements of Christmas observance as if they were essentially Christian symbols, so that, for example, Saginaw's purported ban of red and green clothing is an anti-Christian act. This is in contrast to many earlier critics of Christmas, such as the Puritans or the Jehovah's Witnesses: by them, the removal of Christmas trees, yule logs, and so forth would be viewed as pro-Christian.

Second, earlier critics have usually seen Christian observance as coming under attack from generalized secular and capitalist trends. Modern critics tend to see Christmas as being specifically attacked by a conspiracy of secular forces, and are less concerned about the commercialization of Christmas per se. For example, John Gibson, wrote a book entitled *The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Christian Holiday Is Worse Than You Thought* (ISBN 1-59523-016-5), which was published in October of 2005. Gibson and others claim the abolition of Christmas (War on Christmas) is part of a broader "culture war" waged by progressives. O'Reilly claimed that "it's all part of the secular progressive agenda ... to get Christianity and spirituality and Judaism out of the public square." He also went on to say that this larger agenda includes "legalization of narcotics, euthanasia, abortion at will, gay marriage." [3] In this alleged recent movement, Gibson has charged that a wide array of groups, including "liberals," "secular progressives," the ACLU, the Anti-Defamation League, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State are the forces behind the attack, while O'Reilly has focused more narrowly on the ACLU and billionaire financier George Soros. [4] [5]

## See also

- [Christmas](#)
- [Christmastime greetings](#)
- See [Santa Claus](#) for entry on the Christian opposition to Santa Claus
- Secularization of other Christian holidays

## Organizations

- American Family Association, led a boycott of Target stores in December 2005.
- American Civil Liberties Union
- Americans United for Separation of Church and State
- Center for Reclaiming America, led by D. James Kennedy and Gary Cass.
- Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights
- Committee to Save Merry Christmas, led by Maneul Zamorano
- Friend or Foe Christmas Campaign, hosted by Liberty Counsel

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## White Christmas

A **white Christmas**, to most people in the Northern Hemisphere, refers to snowy weather on [Christmas Day](#), a phenomenon which is far more common in some countries than in others. For example, in many parts of the USA, snow is seldom experienced at Christmas except in the mountains; but most parts of Canada except for southern British Columbia, southern Alberta, southern Ontario and parts of the Maritimes stand an excellent chance of experiencing a white Christmas. The same goes for the countries in northern Europe, such as ones in Scandinavia, the Baltic States, northern Russia, Belarus. Due to oceanic climate and such, the further west a country is in Europe, the lower the probability that it will have a white Christmas (e.g., in southern France it is very rare, while in Bucharest, Romania, which is at a similar latitude, a white Christmas is much more likely).

Some of the least-likely white Christmases that have happened include the 2004 Christmas Eve Snowstorm, which brought the first white Christmas in 50 years to New Orleans and caused the first ever white Christmas to Houston, Texas. The 2004 storm also brought the first measurable snow of any kind since 1895 to Brownsville, Texas, and its twin city of Matamoros, Mexico. Many young Laredoans also saw snow for the first time in their lives during the storm. The Florida winter storm of 1989 also occurred immediately before Christmas.

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## Xmas

"**Xmas**" and "**X-mas**" are common abbreviations of the word "Christmas". They are sometimes pronounced "eksmas", but they, and variants such as "Xtemass", originated as handwriting abbreviations for the pronunciation "Christmas". The "-mas" part came from the Anglo-Saxon for "festival", "religious event": *Cr+stesmæsse* or *Cr+stemæsse*. This abbreviation is widely but not universally accepted; some view it as demeaning to Christ, whilst others find it a helpful abbreviation.

The word "Christ" and its compounds, including "Christmas", have been abbreviated for at least the past 1,000 years, long before the modern "Xmas" was commonly used. "Christ" was often written as "XP" or "Xt"; there are references in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as far back as 1021 AD. This X and P arose as the uppercase forms of the Greek letters  $\chi$  and  $\rho$ , used in ancient abbreviations for  $\chi\rho\iota\varsigma$  (Greek for "Christ") (see Labarum), and are still widely seen in many Eastern Orthodox icons depicting Jesus Christ.

Many people believe that the term is part of an effort to "take Christ out of Christmas" or to literally "cross out Christ"; it is also seen as evidence of the [secularization of Christmas](#) or a vehicle for pushing political correctness, or as a symptom of the commercialization of the holiday (as the abbreviation has long been used by retailers).

The occasionally felt belief that the "X" represents the cross Christ was crucified on has no basis in fact; regardless, St Andrew's Cross is X-shaped, but Christ's cross was probably shaped like a T or a  $\dagger$ . Indeed, X-as-chi was associated with Christ long before X-as-cross could be, since the cross as a Christian symbol developed later. (The Greek letter Chi  $\chi$  stood for "Christ" in the ancient Greek acrostic  $\chi\rho\iota\varsigma$  ichthys.) While some see the spelling of



Christmas as Xmas a threat, others see it as a way to honor the martyrs. The use of X as an abbreviation for "cross" in modern abbreviated writing (e.g. "Kings X" for "Kings Cross") may have reinforced this assumption.



This 1922 *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement uses "Xmas".

In ancient Christian art Ç and ÇÁ are abbreviations for Christ's name. In many manuscripts of the New Testament and icons, X is an abbreviation for Christos, as is XC (the first and last letters in Greek, using the lunate sigma); compare IC for Jesus in Greek. The Oxford English Dictionary documents the use of this abbreviation back to 1551, 50 years before the first English colonists came to North America and 60 years before the King James Version of the Bible was completed. At the same time, Xian and Xianity were in frequent use as abbreviations of "Christian" and "Christianity"; and nowadays still are sometimes so used, but much less than "Xmas". The proper names containing the name "Christ" other than aforementioned are rarely abbreviated in this way (e.g. Hayden Xensen for the actor name "Hayden Christensen"). Pop artist Christina Aguilera is known to spell her first name as 'Xtina'.

This apparent usage of "X" to spell the syllable "kris" (rather than the sounds "ks") has extended to "xtal" for "crystal", and on florists' signs "xant" for "chrysanthemum" (though these words are not etymologically related to "Christ"; "crystal" comes from a Greek word meaning "ice", and "chrysanthemum" from Greek words meaning "golden flower", while "Christ" comes from a Greek word meaning "anointed").

In the animated television show *Futurama*, which is set in the 31st century, Xmas is the official name for the day formerly known as Christmas (which has become an "archaic pronunciation").

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## Christmas characters

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## Santa Claus

**Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, Saint Nick, Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, Santy**, or simply **Santa** is a gift-giving figure in various cultures who distributes presents to children, traditionally on [Christmas Eve](#). The popular American form *Santa Claus* originated as a mispronunciation of Dutch *Sinterklaas*, which is a contracted form of *Sint Nicolaas* (Saint Nicholas).

**Father Christmas** is a well-loved figure in many countries and predates the "Santa Claus" character. "Father Christmas" is similar in many ways, though the two have quite different origins. Using 'Santa' in places that predominantly call him 'Father Christmas' is often viewed as an Americanism and is quite rare, although they are generally regarded as the same character. Father Christmas is also present instead of "Santa" in Albania ("Babadimri"), Armenia ("Gaghant Baba"), Denmark ("Julemanden"), Italy ("Babbo Natale"), Lithuania ("Kalds Senelis"), Brazil ("Papai Noel"), Czech Republic ("Ježíšek"), Poland ("Zwity MikoBaj"), Portugal ("Pai Natal"), Romania ("Mo\_ Crciun"), Germany ("Weihnachtsmann" or "Nikolaus"), Greece ("Ἅγιος Βασίλης"), Scottish Highlands ("Daidáin na Nollaig"), France and French Canada ("Le Père Noël"), Ireland ("Daidí na Nollaig"), Finland ("Joulupukki"), Norway ("Julenissen"), Sweden ("Jultomten"), Bulgaria ("Dyado Koleda"), Turkey ("Noel Baba"), Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Deda Mraz"), Spain and Latin America ("Papá Noel"), Afghanistan ("Baba Chaghaloo"), Iraq and South Africa ("Vader Kersfees"), Chile (Viejo Pascuero), Egypt ("Papa Noël"), Iran ("Baba Noel").

In October of 2006 USA Today listed Santa Claus (St. Nick) as #4 on their list of Imaginary Luminaries: the 101 most influential people who never lived.[\[1\]](#)

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## Overview

Santa Claus is a variation of a Dutch folk tale based on the historical figure [Saint Nicholas](#), a bishop from Turkey (then known as Myra), who gave presents to the poor. His charity became legend when a man lost his fortune and found himself incapable of supporting his three daughters, who would not be able to find husbands as they lacked dowries. This man was going to give them over to a life of prostitution; however, St. Nicholas provided them with gold, enabling them to retain their virginal virtues and marry.

This inspired the mythical figure of [Sinterklaas](#), the subject of a major celebration in the Netherlands and Belgium, Germany (where his alleged date of death, December 6, is celebrated the evening before on December 5), which in turn inspired both the myth and the name of Santa Claus (actually a mispronunciation of the Dutch word "Sinterklaas" by the English settlers of New Amsterdam (later renamed New York)). Whilst in those countries **Saint Nicholas** is celebrated as a distinct character with a religious touch, **Santa Claus** is also making inroads as a symbol during Christmas.

He forms an important part of the [Christmas](#) tradition throughout the Western world and Japan and other parts of East Asia.

In many Eastern Orthodox traditions, Santa Claus visits children on New Year's Day and is identified with Saint Basil whose memory is celebrated on that day.

Depictions of Santa Claus also have a close relationship with the Russian character of [Ded Moroz](#) ("Grandfather Frost"). He delivers presents to children and has a red coat, fur boots and long white beard. Much of the iconography of Santa Claus could be seen to derive from Russian traditions of *Ded Moroz*, particularly transmitted into western European culture through his German folklore equivalent, *Väterchen Frost*.

Conventionally, Santa Claus is portrayed as a kindly, round-bellied, merry, bespectacled white man in a red coat trimmed with white fur (perhaps remotely derived from the episcopal vestments of the original Bishop Nicholas), with a long white beard and green or white gloves. On Christmas Eve, he rides in his sleigh pulled by flying reindeer from house to house to give presents to children. To enter the house, Santa Claus comes down the chimney and exits through the fireplace. During the rest of the year he lives together with his wife [Mrs. Claus](#) and his [elves](#) manufacturing toys. Some modern depictions of Santa (often in advertising and popular entertainment) will show the elves and Santa's workshop as more of a processing and distribution facility, ordering and receiving the toys from various toy manufacturers from across the world. His home is usually given as either the North Pole, in northern Canada, Korvatunturi in Finnish Lapland, Dalecarlia in Sweden, or Greenland, depending on the tradition and country. Sometimes Santa's home is in Caesarea when he is identified as Saint Basil. L. Frank Baum placed his home in The Laughing Valley of Hohaho.

## Historical origins

Main article: [Origins of Santa Claus](#)

See also: [Christmas gift-bringers around the world](#) and [Christmas worldwide](#)

## Santa Claus in popular culture

A classic American image of Santa Claus.



## Santa Claus rituals

Several rituals have developed around the Santa Claus figure that are normally performed by children hoping to receive gifts from him. See main article: [Santa Claus rituals](#).

## Ho, ho, ho

**Ho ho ho** is the way that many languages write out how Santa Claus laughs. "**Ho, ho, ho!** Merry Christmas!"

The laughter of Santa Claus has long been an important attribute by which the character is identified, but it also does not appear in many non-English-speaking countries. The traditional Christmas poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* relates that Santa has:

*... a little round belly*

*That shook when he laugh'd, like a bowl full of jelly*

*Ho ho ho* represents an attempt to write the deep belly-laugh of Santa Claus, as opposed to the conventional, higher-pitched *ha ha* that represents the laughter of thinner characters, or the snickering, cynical *bwa ha ha!* associated with the villains of melodrama.

Jacob Grimm asserts that "Ho ho ho" was the hunting cry of Odin during *The Furious Host*. Odin being attributal to Santa Claus.

"H0H 0H0" is a postal code used by Canada Post for routing letters sent in Canada to Santa Claus at the North Pole. The alphanumeric sequence falls within a grouping associated with the Montreal, Quebec area.

## Santa Claus reindeers' name

Main article: [Santa Claus' reindeer](#)

Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen are the most commonly cited names of Santa's eight reindeer. In the original Clement C. Moore poem "*The Night Before Christmas*", from which the names of the reindeer came, the reindeer known today as Donner and Blitzen were originally Dunder and Blixem. Dunder was later reprinted as Donder, which developed into Donner; while Blixem quickly became Blixen and then Blitzen.<sup>[2]</sup>

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was created for Montgomery Ward in 1939, and has since entered the public consciousness as Santa's ninth reindeer.

## Santa Claus on film

Main article: [Santa Claus on film](#)

## Christian opposition to Santa Claus

Also see main article: [Secularization of Christmas](#)



Behold the majesty and grace  
Of loueing, cheerefull, Christmas face:  
Whome many thousandes with one breath  
Cry out let him be put to death.  
Who maadee Can neuer die:  
So long as man hath memory.

Excerpt from Josiah King's *The Examination and Tryal of Father Christmas* (1686), published shortly after [Christmas](#) was reinstated as a holy day in England. *Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.*

Despite Santa Claus's mixed Christian roots, he has become a secular representation of Christmas. As such, a small number of primarily fundamentalist Christian churches dislike the secular focus on Santa Claus and the materialist focus that present-receiving gives to the holiday.

People who condemn the Santa-ization of Christmas are in the minority.

Such a condemnation of Santa Claus is not a twentieth century phenomenon, but originated among some Protestant groups of the 16th century and was prevalent among the Puritans of 17th century England and America who banned the holiday as either pagan or Roman Catholic. Following the English Civil War, under Oliver Cromwell's government Christmas was banned. Following the Restoration of the monarchy and with Puritans out of power in England,[3] the ban on Christmas was satirized in works such as Josiah King's *The Examination and Tryal of Old Father Christmas; Together with his Clearing by the Jury* (1686) [Nissenbaum, chap. 1].

Rev. Paul Nedergaard, a clergyman in Copenhagen, Denmark, drew the ire of Danish citizens in 1958 when he declared Santa to be a "pagan goblin" after Santa's image was used on fundraising materials for a Danish welfare organization [Clar, 337]. One prominent religious group that refuses to celebrate Santa Claus or Christmas for similar reasons are the

Jehovah's Witnesses, but several denominations of Christians have varying concerns about Santa Claus.

Some Christians would prefer that the focus of the Christmas season be placed on the actual birth of Jesus. Some parents are uncomfortable about lying to their children about the existence of Santa. Some parents worry that their children might think that if they were deceived by their parents about Santa Claus, parents might also be deceiving them about the existence of God. Some in this group who still wish to participate in the festive gift-giving atmosphere of "Santa season" will shop for toys to donate to underprivileged children on [St. Nicholas](#)'s feast day, December 6. This is an opportunity to instill the Christian value of secret charity, which Nicholas was known for. Although feast days are usually not acknowledged in Protestant denominations, this tradition has found acceptance there as well.

While these viewpoints do not represent the majority of Christians, their comments have drawn the attention of critics such as the fictional Landover Baptist Church, whose website satirizes and parodies this viewpoint. The website specifies that Satan is disguising himself as Santa (notice the same letters used in an anagram) to deceive people into a materialistic celebration.

## See also

- [American Christmas traditions](#)
- [Christmas](#)
- [Christmas Eve](#)
- [German Christmas traditions](#)
- [Santa Claus parade](#)
- [Secularization of Christmas](#)

Related figures:

- [Companions of Saint Nicholas](#)
- [Father Christmas](#)
- [Secret Santa](#)

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Categories: [Santa Claus](#) | [Christmas characters](#) | [Christmas traditions](#)

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## Origins of Santa Claus

The modern [Santa Claus](#) is thought to be a composite character made up from the merging of quite separate figures.

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- [2 Germanic folklore](#)
- [3 Modern origins](#)
- [4 American origins](#)
- [5 Other possible origins](#)
- [6 See also](#)

### Ancient Christian origins

The first of these is Saint Nicholas of Myra, a 4th century CE Christian bishop of Myra in Lycia, a province of Byzantine Anatolia, now in Turkey. Nicholas was famous for his generous gifts to the poor, in particular presenting the three impoverished daughters of a pious Christian with dowries so that they would not have to become prostitutes. He was born at Patara, province of Lycia, Asia Minor. He was very religious from an early age and devoted his life entirely to Christianity. In Europe (more precisely the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Germany) he is still portrayed as a bearded bishop in canonical robes. The relics of St. Nicholas were transported to Bari in southern Italy by some enterprising Italian merchants; a basilica was constructed in 1087 to house them and the area became a pilgrimage site for the devout. Saint Nicholas became revered by many as the patron saint of seamen, merchants, archers, children, prostitutes, pharmacists, lawyers, pawnbrokers, prisoners, the city of Amsterdam and of Russia. In Greece, Saint Nicholas is sometimes substituted for Saint Basil (Agios Vasilis in Greek), a 4th century AD bishop from Caesarea. Also, a few villages in West Flanders, Belgium, celebrate a near identical figure, Sint-Maarten (Saint Martin of Tours).[\[1\]](#)



## Germanic folklore



Odin, the wanderer.

Prior to the Germanic peoples' conversion to Christianity, Germanic folklore contained stories about the god Odin (Wodan), who would each year, at Yule, have a great hunting party accompanied by his fellow gods and the fallen warriors residing in his realm. Children would place their boots, filled with carrots, straw or sugar, near the chimney for Odin's flying horse, Sleipnir, to eat. Odin would then reward those children for their kindness by replacing Sleipnir's food with gifts or candy [Siefker, chap. 9, esp. 171-173]. This practice survived in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands after the adoption of Christianity and became associated with Saint Nicholas. Children still place their straw filled shoes at the chimney every winter night, and Saint Nicholas (who, unlike Santa, is still riding a horse) rewards them with candy and gifts. Odin's appearance was often similar to that of Saint Nicholas, being depicted as an old, mysterious man with a beard. (Other features, like the absence of one eye, are not found in Saint Nicholas.) This practice in turn came to America via the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam prior to the British seizure in the 17th century, and evolved into the hanging of socks or stockings at the fireplace.

Another early folk tale, originating among the Germanic tribes, tells of a holy man (sometimes Saint Nicholas), and a demon (sometimes the Devil, Krampus, or a troll). The story states that the land was terrorized by a monster who at night would slither down the chimneys and slaughter children (disembowelling them or stuffing them up the flue, or keeping them in a sack to eat later). The holy man sought out the demon, and tricked it with blessed or magical shackles (in some versions the same shackles that imprisoned Christ prior to the crucifixion, in other versions the shackles were those used to hold St. Peter or Paul of

Tarsus); the demon was trapped and forced to obey the saint's orders. The saint ordered him to go to each house and make amends, by delivering gifts to the children. Depending on the version, the saint either made the demon fulfil this task every year, or the demon was so disgusted by the act of good will that it chose to be sent back to Hell.

Yet other versions have the demon reform under the saint's orders, and go on to recruit other elves and imps into helping him, thus becoming Santa Claus. In an alternate Dutch version, the saint is aided by slaves, commonly typified as Zwarte Piet ("Black Peter"). Some tales depict Zwarte Piet beating bad children with a rod or even taking them to Spain (formerly ruled by the Moors) in a sack. Though some people find the tradition of zwarte piet discriminating, because this would refer to the fact that Saint Nicolas would have negro slaves to do the work for him in the busy days before pakjesavond (boxing day); according to those people this would promote and teach hate and racism to young children. This story is only partially true, zwarte piet started his "career" as a slave indeed, but not in service of Saint Nicolas. In fact Saint Nicolas was the one who bought zwarte piet from a slavetrader, only to set him free. Grateful as zwarte piet was however, he didn't have anywhere to go as he was separated from his relatives and had no job to support himself. Saint Nicolas offered him a job (in some (fictional) stories this job was listing all the kids their wishes for boxing day, other stories say that zwarte piet was keeping track of all the bad children, in order to capture them in a sack and take them to Spain... as Spain would be the home country of Sinterklaas). In recent decenia this story has been changed to normal servants who have black faces because they climb through chimney's and get blackened by the soot from the fires. Black Peters are to Saint Nicolas, what the elves are to Santa Claus... in tradition the Saint has a Peter for every function.. for example: Navigation Peters to navigate the steamboat from Spain to Holland, acrobatic Peters for climbing up the roofs to stuff presents through the chimney, or to climb through themselves etc. etc. And through the years a lot of stories were added, mostly made up by parents to keep their childrens faith in Saint Nicolas (often called "De goede Sint" (the good/friendly Saint), and to prevent their children from misbehaviour, as they are told that good behaviour would be rewarded on boxing-day.

Another form of the above tale in Germany is of the *Pelznickel* or *Belsnickle* ("Furry Nicholas") who visited naughty children in their sleep. The name originated from the fact that the person appeared to be a huge beast since he was covered from head to toe in furs.

## Modern origins

Pre-modern representations of the gift-giver from church history and folklore merged with the British character Father Christmas to create the character known to Britons and Americans as *Santa Claus*. Father Christmas dates back at least as far as the 17th century in Britain, and pictures of him survive from that era, portraying him as a well-nourished bearded man dressed in a long, green, fur-lined robe. He typified the spirit of good cheer at Christmas, and was reflected in the "Ghost of Christmas Present" in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

The name *Santa Claus* is derived from *Sinterklaas*, the Dutch name for the mythical character based on St. Nicholas. He is also known there by the name of Sint Nicolaas which explains the use of the two fairly dissimilar names Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas or St. Nick.

Sinterklaas wears clothing similar to a bishop's. He wears a red miter (a liturgical headdress worn by bishops and abbots) with a 'golden' cross and carries a bishop's staff. The connection with the original bishop of Myra is still evident here. He rides a white horse over rooftops and his helpers climb down chimneys to deposit gifts (sometimes in children's shoes by the fireplace). Sinterklaas arrives from Spain on a steamboat and is accompanied by 'Zwarte Piet', his negroid helpers.



Folk tale depiction of Father Christmas riding on a goat. Perhaps an evolved version of the Swedish [Tomte](#).

Presents given during this feast are often accompanied by poems, sometimes fairly basic, sometimes quite elaborate pieces of art that mock events in the past year relating to the recipient (who is thus at the receiving end in more than one sense). The gifts themselves may be just an excuse for the wrapping, which can also be quite elaborate. The more serious gifts may be reserved for the next morning. Since the giving of presents is Sinterklaas's job presents are traditionally not given at Christmas in the Netherlands, but commercialism is starting to tap into this market.

In other countries, the figure of Saint Nicholas was also blended with local folklore. As an example of the still surviving pagan imagery, in Nordic countries there was the [Yule Goat](#) (Swedish *julbock*, Norwegian "julebuk", Finnish *joulupukki*), a somewhat startling figure with horns which delivered the presents on Christmas Eve. A straw goat is still a common Christmas decoration in Sweden, Norway and Finland. In the 1840's, the farm gnome in Nordic folklore started to deliver the Christmas presents in Denmark, but was then called the "Julenisse", dressed in gray clothes and a red hat. By the end of the 19th century this tradition had also spread to Norway and Sweden (where the "nisse" is called [Tomte](#)),

replacing the Yule Goat. The same thing happened in Finland, but there the more human figure retained the Yule Goat name.

## American origins



Thomas Nast immortalized Santa Claus with an illustration for the January 3, 1863, issue of Harper's Weekly.

In the British colonies of North America and later the United States, British and Dutch versions of the gift-giver merged further. For example, in Washington Irving's *History of New York*, Sinterklaas was Americanized into "Santa Claus" but lost his bishop's apparel, and was at first pictured as a thick-bellied Dutch sailor with a pipe in a green winter coat. Irving's book was a lampoon of the Dutch culture of New York, and much of this portrait is his joking invention.

Modern ideas of Santa Claus seemingly became canon after the publication of the poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" (better known today as "The Night Before Christmas") in the Troy, New York, Sentinel on December 23, 1823. The poem is ascribed to Clement Clarke Moore, although there is some question as to his authorship. In this poem Santa is established as a heavyset individual with eight reindeer (who are named for the first time). Santa Claus later appeared in various colored costumes as he gradually became amalgamated with the figure of Father Christmas, but red soon became popular after he appeared wearing such on an 1885 Christmas card. Still, one of the first artists to capture Santa Claus's image as we know him today was Thomas Nast, an American cartoonist of the 19th century. In 1863, a picture of Santa illustrated by Nast appeared in Harper's Weekly (it is believed the inspiration for his image came from the Pelznickle). Another popularization was *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, a 1902 biography (of sorts) from youth to old age by L. Frank Baum, author

of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Much of Santa Claus's mythos was not set in stone at the time, and Baum almost completely ignored the poem, giving his "Neclaus" (Necile's Little One) a wide variety of immortal support (Fairies, Wood Nymphs (including his adoptive mother, Necile), Knooks, Ryls, Sound Imps, Light Elves, Sleep Fays, Gnomes, Water Spirits, Wind Demons, and the lioness Shiegra), a home in the Laughing Valley of Hohaho, and ten reindeer that were not domesticated at all (and had different names from the poem), but whom the Knooks let out of the forest one day each year (and they could not fly, but leapt in enormous, flight-like bounds). Most importantly, Baum revealed that Claus's immortality was earned, much like his title ("Santa"), decided by a vote of those naturally immortal. True to his historic origins as a bishop, Baum's Santa Claus never married. Baum also established Claus's motives: a happy childhood among immortals. When Ak, Master Woodsman of the World, exposes him to the misery and poverty of children in the outside world, he strives to find a way to bring joy into the lives of all children, and eventually invents toys as a principal means.

Images of Santa Claus were further cemented through Haddon Sundblom's depiction of him for The Coca-Cola Company's Christmas advertising. The popularity of the image spawned urban legends that Santa Claus was in fact invented by Coca-Cola. Nevertheless, Santa Claus and Coca-Cola have been closely associated.<sup>[2]</sup> The image of Santa Claus as a benevolent character became reinforced with its association with charity and philanthropy, particularly organizations such as the Salvation Army. Volunteers dressed as Santa Claus typically became part of fundraising drives to aid needy families at Christmas time.



A man dressed up as Santa Claus fundraising for Volunteers of America on the sidewalk of street in Chicago, Illinois, in 1902. He is wearing a mask with a beard attached. DN-0001069, *Chicago Daily News negatives collection*, Chicago Historical Society.

Some suspect that the depiction of Santa at the North Pole reflected popular opinion about industry at the time. In some images of the early 20th century, Santa was depicted as personally making his toys by hand in a small workshop like a craftsman. Eventually, the idea emerged that he had numerous elves responsible for making the toys, but the toys were still handmade by each individual elf working in the traditional manner. By the end of the

century, the reality of mass mechanized production became more fully accepted by the Western public. That shift was reflected in the modern depiction of Santa's residence—now often humorously portrayed as a fully mechanized production facility, equipped with the latest manufacturing technology, and overseen by the elves with Santa and Mrs. Claus as managers [see Nissenbaum, chap. 2; Belk, 87-100]. Many television commercials depict this as a sort of humorous business, with Santa's elves acting as a sometimes mischievously disgruntled workforce, cracking jokes and pulling pranks on their boss. Santa Claus continues to inspire writers and artists, such as in author Seabury Quinn's 1948 novel *Roads*. Other additions to early ideas of Santa include Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, the ninth and lead reindeer immortalized in a Gene Autry song, written by a Montgomery Ward copywriter.

## Other possible origins

American mycologists Jonathan Ott, James Arthur, Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit as well as UK mycologist Dr. Patrick Harding suggest that many of the modern features attributed to Santa Claus may somehow be derived from those of the Kamchatkan or Siberian shaman. Apparently, during the midwinter festival (holiday season) in Siberia (near the North Pole), the shaman would enter a yurt (home) through the shangrak (chimney), bringing with him a sack of fly agaric mushrooms (presents) to give to the inhabitants. This type of mushroom is brightly colored red and white, like Santa Claus, though some question the relevance of this, the above scholars' research provides many astounding associations that make their work highly probable. The mushrooms were often hung (to dry) in front of the fireplace, much like the [stockings](#) of modern-day Christmas. Furthermore, the mushrooms were associated with reindeer who were known to eat them and become intoxicated. Reindeer are also associated with the shaman, and like Santa Claus, many people believed that the shaman could fly.

## See also

- [Santa Claus](#)
- [Christmas](#)
- [Secularization of Christmas](#)

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# Santa Claus rituals

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- 5 "Santa Claus" in shopping malls

## Christmas Eve rituals

In the United States and Canada, the tradition is to leave Santa a glass of milk and cookies; in Britain and Australia, he is sometimes given sherry and mince pies instead.

British, Australian and American children also leave out a carrot for Santa's reindeer, and were traditionally told that if they are not good all year round, that they will receive a lump of coal in their stockings, although this practice is now considered archaic. Children following the Dutch custom for *sinterklaas* will "put out their shoe" — that is, leave hay and a carrot for his horse in a shoe before going to bed — sometimes weeks before the *sinterklaas avond*. The next morning they will find the hay and carrot replaced by a gift; often, this is a [marzipan](#) figurine. Naughty children were once told that they would be left a *roe* (a bundle of sticks) instead of sweets, but this practice has been discontinued.

## Letter writing

Writing letters to Santa Claus has been a Christmas tradition for children for many years. These letters normally contain a wishlist of toys and assertions of good behavior. Some social scientists have found that boys and girls write different types of letters. Girls generally write more polite, longer (although they do not request more), and express the nature of Christmas more in their letters than in letters written by boys. Girls also request gifts for other people on a more frequent basis [Otnes, Kim, and Kim, 20-21].

Many postal services allow children to send letters to Santa Claus pleading their good behavior and requesting gifts; these letters may be answered by postal workers or other volunteers. Canada Post has a special postal code for letters to Santa Claus, and since 1982 over 13,000 Canadian postal workers have volunteered to write responses. His address is: Santa Claus, North Pole, Canada, H0H 0H0 [\[1\]](#) (see also: Ho ho ho). (This postal code, in which zeroes are used for the letter "O" is consistent with the alternating letter-number format of all Canadian postal codes.) Sometimes children's charities answer letters in poorer communities or from children's hospitals in order to give them presents that they would not otherwise receive.

In Britain it is tradition to burn the Christmas letters on the fire so that they would be magically transported by the wind to the North Pole however this tradition is dying out in modern times with few people having true open fires in their homes.

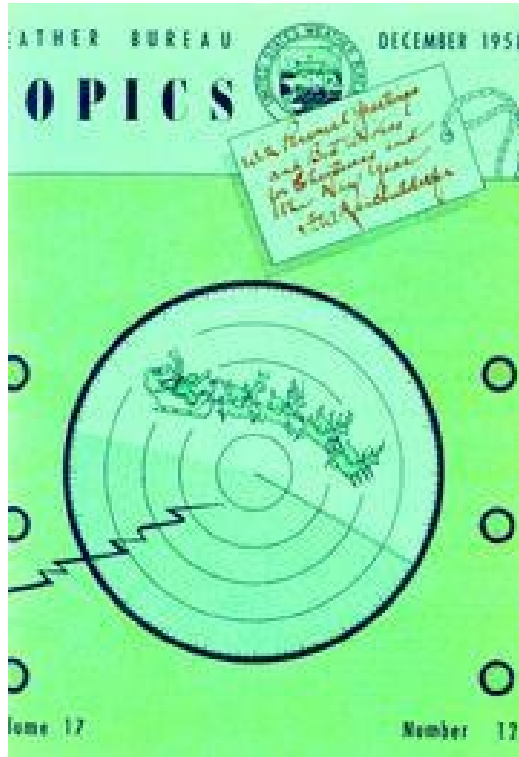
Through the years Santa Claus of Finland has received over eight million letters. He gets over 600,000 letters every year from over 150 countries. Children from Great Britain, Poland and Japan are the busiest writers. The Finnish Santa Claus lives in Korvatunturi but Santa's Official Post Office is situated in Rovaniemi at the Arctic circle. His address is this: Santa Claus, Santa Claus Village, FIN-96930 Arctic Circle, Finland.

As opposing to children writing a letter to Santa Claus, parents of those children can order a personalized "Santa letter", such as from Santa The PenPal [\[2\]](#), to be sent to their children - often with a North Pole postmarked on the envelope to simulate that the letter is from Santa Claus. Because the density of where these parents live is extremely low in any given area, this "Santa Letter" market therefore heavily rely on internet as a medium for parents to order



these santa letters rather than ordering from an ordinary retail store. However, there are criticisms regarding to moral or ethical concern to this kind of business whether parents are lying to children by ordering these Santa Letters, and if so, is it ok to lie to the children?

## Websites and e-mail



The Christmas issue of NOAA's *Weather Bureau Topics* with "Santa Claus" streaking across a weather radar screen, 1958.

Some people have created websites designed to allow children and other interested parties to "track" Santa Claus on Christmas Eve via radar; while in transit, Santa Claus is sometimes escorted by Air Force fighter jets [3]. In 1955, a Sears Roebuck store in Colorado Springs, Colorado, gave children a number to call a "Santa hotline". The number was mistyped and children called the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD) on Christmas Eve instead. The Director of Operations, Col. Harry Shoup, received the first call for Santa and responded by telling children that there were signs on the radar that Santa was indeed heading south from North Pole. In 1958, Canada and the United States jointly created the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) and together tracked Santa Claus for children of North America that year and ever since.[4]. This tracking can now be done by children via the Internet and NORAD's website.

Many local television stations in the United States and Canada likewise track Santa Claus in their own metropolitan areas through the stations' meteorologists.

Many other websites are available year-round that are devoted to Santa Claus and keeping tabs on his activities in his workshop. Many of these websites also include e-mail



addresses, a modern version of the postal service letter writing, in which children can send Santa Claus e-mail.

## Songs



Cover to the sheet music for "Santa Claus' Galop" (1874) by composer Charles Kinkel.

Over the years, Santa Claus has inspired several songs and even orchestral works. As early as 1853, Louis Antoine Jullien composed an orchestral piece titled *Santa Claus* which premiered to mixed reviews in New York that year [Horowitz, 213]. More popular, well-known songs about Santa Claus (mostly sung by children) include:

- "Christmas All Over the World" (1985) by Bill House and John Hobbs, from the Original Motion Picture Soundtrack of *Santa Claus: The Movie*, sung by Sheena Easton.
- "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" (1979) by Randy Brooks, recorded by Elmo Shropshire and Patsy Trigg.
- "Here Comes Santa Claus" (1947) by Gene Autry and Oakley Haldeman.
- "I Believe in Father Christmas" by Greg Lake and Peter Sinfield.
- "Jolly Old St. Nicholas" traditional.
- "Little Saint Nick" by Brian Wilson, performed by The Beach Boys.
- "The Night Santa Went Crazy" (1996) by "Weird Al" Yankovic (satire).
- "Santa Baby" (1953) by Joan Javits, Philip Springer, and Tony Springer, performed by Eartha Kitt.
- "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" (1935) by J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie.
- "Up on the Housetop" traditional.

## "Santa Claus" in shopping malls



Eaton's Santa Claus Parade, 1918, Toronto, Canada. Having arrived at the Eaton's department store, Santa is readying his ladder to climb up onto the building.

Santa Claus is also a costumed character who appears at Christmas time in department stores or shopping malls, or at parties. He is played by an actor, usually helped by other actors (often mall employees or contractors) dressed as elves or other creatures of folklore. His function is either to promote the store's image by distributing small gifts to children, or to provide a seasonal experience to children by having them sit on his knee (a practice now under review by some organisations in Britain [\[5\]](#), and Switzerland [\[6\]](#)), state what they wish to get, and often have a photograph taken. The area set up for this purpose is festively decorated, usually with a large throne, and is called variously "Santa's Grotto", "Santa's Workshop" or a similar term. In America the most notable of these is the Santa at the flagship Macy's store in New York City - he arrives at the store by sleigh in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on the last float, and his court takes over a large portion of one floor in the store. Essayist David Sedaris is known for the satirical diary he kept while working as an elf in the Macy's display, which he later published.

If and when a shop or party Santa is discovered to be an imposter by an observant youngster, a common way out is to simply admit that he is not the real Santa, but helping him at this time of year. Most young children seem to already understand this, as the "real" Santa would be extremely busy around Christmas time.

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## Santa Claus on film

**Spoiler warning: *Plot and/or ending details follow.***

Probably the only place where [Santa Claus](#) makes as many appearances as in the malls is on the big screen. Motion pictures of St. Nick abound and apparently constitute their own sub-genre of the Christmas film genre. Early films of Santa revolve around similar simple plots of Santa's Christmas eve visit to children. In 1897, in a short film called [Santa Claus Filling Stockings](#), Santa Claus is simply filling stockings from his pack of toys. Another film called [Santa Claus and the Children](#) was made in 1898. A year later, a film directed by George Albert Smith in 1899 titled [Santa Claus](#) (or [The Visit from Santa Claus](#) in the United Kingdom) was created. In this picture Santa Claus enters the room from the fireplace and proceeds to trim the tree. He then fills the stockings that were previously hung on the mantle by the children. After walking backward and surveying his work, he suddenly darts at the fireplace and disappears up the chimney. [Santa Claus' Visit](#) in 1900 featured a scene with two little children kneeling at the feet of their mother and saying their prayers. The mother tucks the children snugly in bed and leaves the room. Santa Claus suddenly appears on the roof, just outside the children's bedroom window, and proceeds to enter the chimney, taking with him his bag of presents and a little hand sled for one of the children. He goes down the chimney and suddenly appears in the children's room through the fireplace. He distributes the presents and mysteriously causes the appearance of a Christmas tree laden with gifts. The scene closes with the children waking up and running to the fireplace just too late to catch him by the legs. A 1909 film by D. W. Griffith titled [A Trap for Santa Claus](#) shows children setting a trap to capture Santa Claus as he descends down the chimney, but instead capture their father who abandoned them and their mother but tries to burglarize the house after he discovers she inherited a fortune. A twenty-nine minute 1925 silent film production entitled [Santa Claus](#) by explorer/documentarian Frank E. Kleinschmidt filmed partly in northern Alaska and features Santa in his workshop, visiting his Eskimo neighbors, and tending his reindeer. A year later another movie titled [Santa Claus](#) was produced with sound on De Forest Phonofilm. Over the years various actors have donned the red suit (aside from those discussed below), including Monty Woolley in [Life Begins at Eight-thirty](#) (1942), Alberto Rabagliati in [The Christmas That Almost Wasn't](#) (1966), Dan Aykroyd in *Trading Places* (1983), Jan Rubes in *One Magic Christmas* (1985), David Huddleston in *Santa Claus: The Movie* (1985), Jonathan Taylor Thomas in *I'll Be Home for Christmas* (1998), and Ed Asner in *Elf* (2003). Later films about Santa vary, but can be divided into the following themes.

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**Origins in film**

Some films about Santa Claus seek to explore his origins. They explain how reindeer fly, where elves come from, and other questions children have generally asked about Santa. Two stop motion animation television specials addressed this issue: *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town* (1970) by Rankin/Bass with Mickey Rooney as the voice of Kris reveals how Santa delivered toys to children despite the fact that Burgermeister Meisterburger had forbidden children to play with them and *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* (1985), based on L. Frank Baum's 1902 children's book of the same name, in which Santa is reared by mythical, magical creatures and is granted immortality by them. Another animated version of Baum's book was made by Glen Hill in 2000, and the book also served as the basis for an anime series, *Shounen Santa no Daibôken* ("Young Santa's Adventures") in 1994 and *The Oz Kids* video, *Who Stole Santa?* (1996). None of these films focus on Santa Claus's saintly origins.

## Questioning and believing

Another genre of Santa films seek to dispel doubts about his existence. One of the first films of this nature was titled [\*A Little Girl Who Did Not Believe in Santa Claus\*](#) (1907) and involves a well-to-do boy trying to convince his poorer friend that Santa Claus is real. She doubts because Santa has never visited her family because of their poverty. *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947) starring Natalie Wood as Susan Walker revolves around the disbelief of young Susan whose mother (Maureen O'Hara) employs a kind old man (Edmund Gwenn, who won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor) to play Santa Claus at Macy's; he later convinces Susan that he really is Santa. This film was remade in 1994 and stars Richard Attenborough as Kris Kringle and Mara Wilson as Susan Walker. The television special *Yes Virginia There Is A Santa Claus* (1991) follows the true story of a young girl, Virginia O'Hanlon, who writes a letter to the editor of the *New York Sun* in 1897 after her friends tell her there is no Santa. The newspaper editor tells her that indeed there is a Santa: "He lives, and he lives forever." Francis Pharcellus Church was the real-life editor and is played by Charles Bronson in the film. *The Polar Express* (2004), based on the children's book of the same name, also deals with issues and questions of belief as a magical train conducted by Tom Hanks transports a doubting boy to the North Pole to visit Santa Claus.

## Santa as a hero

Some less-than-serious films feature Santa Claus as a superhero-type figure, such as the 1959 film titled [\*Santa Claus\*](#) produced in Mexico with [\*José Elías Moreno\*](#) as Santa Claus. In this movie Santa allies with Merlin the magician to battle the Devil who is attempting to trap Santa. In the Cold War-era film *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* (1964) where Santa Claus is captured by Martians and brought to Mars and ultimately foils a plot to destroy him. [\*The Night They Saved Christmas\*](#) (1984) starring Art Carney as Santa likewise chronicles how Santa Claus and Claudia Baldwin (Jaclyn Smith), the wife of an oil explorer, have to save the North Pole from explosions while her husband is searching for oil in the Arctic. *Santa Claus: The Movie* also contains a subplot in which Santa Claus rescues Joe ([\*Christian Fitzpatrick\*](#)) from his best friend Cornelia's ([\*Carrie Kei Heim\*](#)) evil uncle B. Z. (John Lithgow).[3] He is a hero in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, held captive by Oogie Boogie. The latest film to depict Santa Claus in such a manner is *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the*

Wardrobe (2005), in which Father Christmas ([James Cosmo](#)) supplies the Pevensie children with the weapons and tools they need to battle the White Witch (Tilda Swinton). In the show South Park Santa is often depicted with firearms, in the episode Red Sleigh Down he battles Iraqis to try to bring Christmas to Iraq, in the episode A Woodland Critter Christmas he uses a combat shotgun to blast away santanic animals who try to give birth to the AntiChrist.

## Succession of Santas

One genre of movies suggest that Santa Claus is not historically a single individual but a succession of individuals. The feature film *Santa Claus: The Movie* (1985) starring David Huddleston as Santa Claus and British actress Judy Cornwell as his wife Anya shows how Santa and his wife are adopted by elves (including elves played by Dudley Moore and Burgess Meredith) in order to deliver their toys all over the world. The film's prologue features a generous old man who assumes Santa-like duties in his home village, and strongly suggests Santa's saintly origins. There is an elaborate sequence depicting the death of the previous office-holder (extremely advanced in age), and the selection of the new Santa Claus, which visually evokes the Papacy and also the divine/supernatural nature of the office/selection process. It is also suggestive of Santa's miraculous ability to live for many years, but not indefinitely. In *Ernest Saves Christmas* (1988), Ernest (Jim Varney) aids Santa Claus/Seth Applegate (Douglas Seale) convince Joe Curruthers (Oliver Clark) to become the next Santa.

In *The Santa Clause* (1994), Tim Allen plays Scott Calvin who accidentally causes Santa Claus to fall off the roof of his house. After he puts on Santa's robes, he becomes subject to the "Santa clause" (like a contract) in which he is required to become the next Santa. Reluctant at first, he falls in love with his newfound role. This film spawned two sequels. In 2002's *The Santa Clause 2* he must find a wife (the "Mrs. Clause") and in 2006's *The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause* he must battle Jack Frost for control of the North Pole. A recent and unique television special also draws upon the succession theme. In [Call Me Claus](#) (2001) Lucy Cullins (Whoopi Goldberg) is an African American woman destined to become the next Santa Claus. She too is reluctant to take on the role. In *The Hebrew Hammer* (2003), the role of Santa Claus is traditionally passed down from father to son. The system is disrupted when the reigning Santa is murdered by his son, Damian, who then uses the position to attack the competing holidays of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.

## Impostor Santas

Several films have been created which explore the consequences should an impostor Santa take over. Probably one of the first films featuring a fake Santa Claus is the 1914 silent film *The Adventure of the Wrong Santa Claus* written by Frederic Arnold Kummer. In this film, a bogus Santa steals all the Christmas presents and amateur detective Octavius (played by Herbert Yost) tries to recover them. Arguably the most notorious impostor appears in the 1966 cartoon based on Dr. Seuss's children's book, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, where the Grinch attempts to rob the Whos in Whoville of their Christmas, but has a change of heart. This animated feature was made into a live-action movie in 2000, directed by Ron Howard and starring Jim Carrey as the Grinch.

Another less-than-friendly impostor appears in *A Christmas Story* (1983) as a disgruntled mall Santa at Higbee's Department Store (a real store in downtown Cleveland, Ohio) in the fictional town of Holman, Indiana. Played by Jeff Gillen, Santa is depicted as a larger-than-life figure who terrifies, rather than amuses, children. Gillen's performance lends credence to the theory that the mall Santa is not quite genuine. Another recent devious mall Santa was played by Billy Bob Thornton in *Bad Santa* (2003), a film which gained normally family-friendly Disney "bad press". Tim Burton's stop-action animated musical film *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) depicts Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King of Halloween Town, wanting to become Santa Claus after an accidental visit to Christmas Town. After the mostly well-meaning but clueless Halloween citizens capture Santa, they try to take over Christmas with disastrous results; the real Santa is almost killed by the Oogie Boogie Man. Santa is voiced here by Ed Ivory, and in the video game spin-offs, Corey Burton. His Japanese voice is done by Tomoaki Nagae. Other darker impostors have appeared in slasher films such as the *Silent Night, Deadly Night* series of the 1980s, *Santa Claws* (1996), and in the short ". . . All Through the House," part of the *Tales from the Crypt* (1972) movie and later remade as episode 1.2 and directed by Robert Zemeckis for the HBO series of the same name. Both were inspired by the *Tales from the Crypt* comic book.

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# Christmas gift-bringers around the world

Many fictional [Christmas](#) gift-bringers exist around the world.

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## Christmas gift-bringers around the world

### Europe and North America

Throughout Europe and North America, Santa Claus is generally known as such, but in some countries the gift-giver's name, attributes, date of arrival, and even identity varies.

- Austria: [Christkind](#) ("Christ child")
- Belgium: "Santa Claus", called [Père Noël](#) by French speakers and Kerstman("Christmas Man") by Flemish speakers, is celebrated on Christmas day;Sinterklaas for the Flemish speakers, [Saint Nicholas](#) for the French speakers is celebrated on December 6th and his a distinct character with a more religious, catholic touch.
- Bulgaria: Олѣнок (Dyado Koleda, "Grandfather Christmas"), with the Russian-borrowed version of Олѣноко (Dyado Mraz, "Grandfather Frost") being somewhat more widespread in Socialist times from the end of WWII until 1989 but generally out of favour nowadays
- Canada: Santa Clause (among English speakers); Le [Père Noël](#) ("Father Christmas"), among French speakers
- Croatia: Djed Božinjak ("Grandfather Christmas"), used to be Djed Mraz (Grandfather Frost - Serbian term) before 1990, Mali Isus ("Baby Jesus"), Sveti Nikola ("Saint Nicholas") bringing gifts or rod on December the 6th
- Czech Republic: Ježíšek (diminutive form of Ježíš ("Jesus"))
- Denmark: Julemanden
- Estonia: Jõuluvana ("Old man of Christmas")
- Finland: [Joulupukki](#) ("Yule Goat")
- France: Le [Père Noël](#) ("Father Christmas"); Père Noël is also the common figure in other French-speaking areas)
- Germany: Weihnachtsmann or Nikolaus ("Christmas Man"); [Christkind](#) in southern Germany
- Greece: Άγιος Βασίλης ("Saint Basil")



- Hungary: Mikulás ("Nicholas"); Jézuska or Kis Jézus ("child Jesus")
- Iceland: Jólásveinn. In Icelandic folktales, there are 13 Santa Clauses.
- Ireland: *Daidí na Nollag* ("Father Christmas") among Irish speakers
- Italy: Babbo Natale ("Father Christmas"); La Befana (similar role as Santa Claus; she rides a broomstick rather than a sleigh, although she is not normally considered a witch); Gesù Bambino ("Baby Jesus"); Santa Lucia (A child saint "operating" in the Northern regions, bringing gift on December the 12th. As well as the Befana, an old lady, comes out on the Epifany, Jan 6th)
- Latvia: Ziemassvētku vecītis
- Liechtenstein: [Christkind](#)
- Lithuania: Kalėdos Senelis
- Luxembourg: Klaussenhof
- Macedonia: Dedo Mraz
- Netherlands "Santa Claus", called Kerstman ("Christmas Man"), is celebrated on Christmas day; Sinterklaas is celebrated on December 5th and has a distinct character with a more religious, catholic touch.
- Norway: Julenissen
- Poland: Zwity Mikołaj / Mikołaj ("Saint Nicholas")
- Portugal: Pai Natal ("Father Christmas")
- Romania: Moș Crăciun ("Old Man Christmas")
- Russia: 54 >@>7 ([Ded Moroz](#), "Grandfather Frost")
- Scotland: Bodach na Nollaig (Scots Gaelic: Old Man of Christmas)
- Slovakia: Mikuláš
- Slovenia: Božicek
- Spain: Papá Noel (Father Noel); the [Tió de Nadal](#) in Catalonia; Olentzero in the Basque Country. A more common and traditional christmas present-giving figure in Spain are "Los Reyes Magos" ("The Three Kings"; "Magi").
- Serbian: Deda Mraz (Grandfather Frost)
- Sweden: [Jultomten](#) ("The Yule/Christmas Gnome")
- Switzerland: [Christkind](#)
- Turkey: Noel Baba ("Father Noel")
- United Kingdom: Santa Claus, also known as [Father Christmas](#) though they were originally two quite different people, and *Father Christmas* did not originally bring gifts
- United States: Santa Claus; [Kris Kringle](#); Saint Nicholas or Saint Nick
- Wales: Siôn Corn

## Latin America

Santa Claus in Latin America is generally referred to with different names from country to country.

- Argentina: Papá Noel, El Niño Dios
- Brazil: Papai Noel
- Chile: Viejito Pascuero



- Colombia: El Niño Dios ("God child")
- Costa Rica: San Nicolás or Santa Clos
- Dominican Republic: Santa Clos/Papá Noe
- Ecuador: El Niño Dios ("God child"), Papá Noel
- Mexico: Santa Claus (pronounced "Santa Clos"); El Niño Dios ("God child," in reference to Jesus).
- Peru: Papá Noel

## East Asia

People in East Asia, particularly countries that have adopted Western cultures, also celebrate Christmas and the gift-giver traditions passed down to them from the West.

- China: #p<sup>o</sup>
- Hong Kong: V•<sup>o</sup> (literally 'The Old Man of Christmas')
- Indonesia: Santa Claus or Sinter Klass (from Netherland Pronunciation )
- Japan: μóç íü<sup>1</sup> (Santa Kuroosu, or Santa-san)
- Korea: °À t\౮ (Santa Harabeoji, or "Grandfather Santa")
- Philippines: Santa Claus
- Taiwan: V•<sup>o</sup> or V•ll (both literally 'The Old Man of Christmas')
- Thailand: 22%-\* (Santa Claus)
- Vietnam: Ông Già Nô-en (literally 'The Old Man of Christmas')

## Central Asia

- India: ,¾æÿ¾ •Í<sup>2</sup>¾,Í (in southern India)
- Tatarstan: Q1\_ Babay/KH 0109 (*Winter Grandfather*)
- Uzbekistan: Qor Bobo (*Snow Grandfather*)

## Africa and the Middle East

Christians in Africa and Middle East who celebrate Christmas generally ascribe to the gift-giver traditions passed down to them by Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Descendants of colonizers still residing in these regions likewise continue the practices of their ancestors.

- Egypt: Baba Noel
- Iran: Baba Noel
- Israel: áàØÔ çÜĐŒá
- South Africa: Sinterklaas; Father Christmas; Santa Claus

## Oceania

- Australia: Father Christmas; Santa Claus
- New Zealand: Father Christmas; Santa Claus

See also: [Christmas worldwide](#)

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# Biblical Magi

In Christian tradition the **Magi**, also known as the **Three Wise Men**, **The Three Kings**, or **Kings from the east**, are Zoroastrian judicial astrologers or magi from Ancient Persia who according to the Gospel of Matthew came "from the east to Jerusalem", to worship the Infant Jesus, whom they describe as the Christ "born King of the Jews". According to Matthew, they followed a star, and as they approached Jerusalem, Herod tried to trick them into revealing where Jesus was, but once they had found Jesus they left by a different route. According to Matthew, upon finding Jesus, the magi gave him an unspecified number of gifts, amongst which are three highly symbolic ones.

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## The nature of the magi

Unlike Luke, Matthew pays no attention to the actual birth of Jesus, focusing instead on what occurred before and after. Skipping the actual birth, Matthew introduces a group of people, the Magi, who have come to pay their respects, while accidentally informing Herod of Jesus' existence.

The word *Magi* is a transliteration of the Greek *magos* (μάγος pl. μάγοι), which is a derivative from Old Persian *Magupati*. The term is a specific occupational title referring to the priestly caste of a distorted form of Zoroastrianism, known as Zurvanism. As part of their religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars, and gained an international reputation for astrology, which at that point was a highly regarded science, only later giving rise to aspects of mathematics and astronomy, as well as the modern practice of fortune telling going by the same name. A clearer indication of their astrological credentials is in the phrase translated in the King James Version of the Bible as *enquired of them diligently*, which is actually a Greek technical word referring directly to astrology, with no direct translation

into English. Their religious practices and astrology caused derivatives of the term *magi* to be applied to the occult in general, namely this is the origin of the word *magic*.



Members of the Medici family parading in the guise of the Three Wise Men through the Tuscan countryside in  
a Benozzo Gozzoli fresco from 1461.

The KJV translation as *wise men* is considered somewhat politically motivated; the exact same word is translated as *sorcerer* to condemn "Elymas the sorcerer" in *Acts 13*, and is left untranslated to describe Simon Magus in *Acts 8*. Treating Simon Magus as being as wise as the Magi that visited Jesus would effectively be heresy - Simon Magus was considered by most Christians as the arch-heretic and founder of Gnosticism, a Christian group condemned as arch-heresy. It is unlikely that the New Testament would deliberately refer to Simon Magus in glowing terms. The modern term *simony* derives from the name of Simon Magus.

The phrase *from the east* is the only information Matthew provides on where the magi came from, apart from identifying that they come from *their own country* rather than Judea. Traditionally the view developed that the magi were Persian or Parthian, a view held for example by John Chrysostom, and historic art works generally depicted them in Persian dress. The main support for this is that the first magi were from Persia and that land still had the largest number of them. Some believe they were from Babylon, which was the centre of Zurvanism, and hence astrology, at the time. Brown comments that the author of Matthew probably didn't have a specific location in mind and the phrase *from the east* is for literary effect and added exoticism.

Though the Bible does not number the Magi, traditionally there were always seen to be three, as there were three gifts given to the child. However, the text also states that other gifts were given, making the number of Magi even less definite.

## Names



*Adoration of the Magi* by Bartolomé Estéban Murillo

In the Eastern church a variety of different names are given for the three, but in the West the names have been settled since the eighth century as Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. The names of the Magi derive from an early sixth Century Greek manuscript in Alexandria, translated into the Latin *Excerpta Latina Barbari*. The Latin text *Collectanea et Flores* continues the tradition of three kings and their names and gives additional details of their clothes, coming from Syria. This text is said to be from the 8th century, of Irish origin. In the Eastern churches, Ethiopian Christianity, for instance, has *Hor*, *Karsudan*, and *Basanater*, while the Armenians have *Kagbha*, *Badadakharida* and *Badadilma* (cf. *Acta Sanctorum*, May, I, 1780 and [Concerning The Magi And Their Names](#)).

None of these names are obviously Persian or are generally agreed to carry any ascertainable meaning, although Caspar is also sometimes given as Gaspar, a variant of the Persian *Jasper* - "Master of the Treasure" - from which the name of the mineral jasper is derived. There is a claim that his real name was *Rustaham-Gondofarr Suren-Pahlav* of the Suren-Pahlav Clan, the ruler of the eastern-greater Iran, who ruled between 10BC to AD17, ruling the vast empire of the Saka at the time of Arsacid dynasty. Another candidate for the origin of the name Caspar appears in the Acts of Thomas as *Gondophares* (AD 21-c.47) i.e. Gudapharasa (from which 'Caspar' derives via the contrived corruption 'Gaspar'). This Gondophares was also a Suren, and declared independence from Parthia to become the first Indo-Parthian king; he is thus likely to be a descendant of the Rustaham-Gondofarr, who was allegedly visited by Thomas the Apostle. Christian legend may have chosen Gondofarr simply because he was an eastern king living in the right time period.

In contrast, the Syrian Christians name the Magi Larvandad, *Gushnasaph*, and *Hormisdas*. These names have a far greater likelihood of being originally Persian, though that does not, of course, guarantee their authenticity.

The first name *Larvandad* is a combination of *Lar*, which is a region near Tehran, and *vand* or *vandad* which is a common suffix in Middle Persian meaning "related to" or "located in". *Vand* is also present in the names of such Iranian locations as *Damavand*, *Nahavand*, *Alvand*, and such names and titles as *Varjavand* and *Vandidad*. Alternatively, it might be a combination of *Larvand* meaning *the region of Lar* and *Dad* meaning "given by". The latter suffix can also be seen in such Iranian names as "Tirdad", "Mehrdad", "Bamdad" or such previously Iranian locations as "Bagdad" ("God Given") presently called Baghdad in Iraq. Thus, the name simply means born in or given by *Lar*.

The second name, *Hormisdas* is a variation of the Persian name *Hormoz* which was *Hormazd* and *Hormazda* in Middle Persian. The name referred to the angel of the first day of each month whose name had been given by the supreme God (of Zoroastrianism) who, in old Persian, was called "Ahuramazda" or "Ormazd".

The third name *Gushnasaph* was a common name used in Old and Middle Persian. In Modern Persian, it is *Gushnasp* or *Gushtasp*. The name is a combination of *Gushn* meaning "full of manly qualities" or "full of desire or energy" for something and *Asp*, Modern Persian *Asb*, which means horse. As all scholars of Iranian studies know, horses were of great importance for the Iranians and many Iranian names including the presently used *Lohrasp*, *Jamasp*, *Garhasp*, and *Gushtasp* contain the suffix. As a result, the second name might mean something like "as energetic and virile as a horse" or "full of desire for having horses". Alternatively, *Gushn* is also recorded to have meant "many". Thus, the name might simply mean "the Owner of Many Horses".

## Tombs

Marco Polo claimed that he was shown the three tombs of the Magi at Saveh south of Tehran in the 1270s:

*"In Persia is the city of Saba, from which the Three Magi set out and in this city they are buried, in three very large and beautiful monuments, side by side. And above them there is a square building, beautifully kept. The bodies are still entire, with hair and beard remaining."* (Book i).

A Shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne Cathedral, according to tradition, contains the bones of the Three Wise Men. Reputedly they were first discovered by Saint Helena on her famous pilgrimage to Palestine and the Holy Lands. She took the remains to the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople; they were later moved to Milan, before being sent to their current resting place by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I in 1164. The Milanese celebrate their part in the tradition by holding a medieval costume parade every 6 January.

A version of the detailed elaboration familiar to us is laid out by the 14th-century cleric John of Hildesheim's *Historia Trium Regum* ("History of the Three Kings"). In accounting for the presence in Cologne of their mummified relics, he begins with the journey of Saint Helena, mother of Constantine the Great to Jerusalem, where she recovered the True Cross and other relics:

*"Queen Helen...began to think greatly of the bodies of these three kings, and she arrayed herself, and accompanied by many attendants, went into the Land of Ind...after she had found the bodies of Melchior, Balthazar, and Casper, Queen Helen put them into one chest and ornamented it with great riches, and she brought them into Constantinople...and laid them in a church that is called Saint Sophia."*

## **The gifts of the magi**

Upon meeting Jesus, the magi are described as handing over gifts and "falling down" in joyous praise. The use of the term "falling down" more properly means lying prostrate on the ground, which, together with the use of kneeling in Luke's birth narrative, had an important effect on Christian religious practice. Previously both Jewish and Roman tradition had viewed kneeling and prostration as undignified (although for Persians it was a sign of great respect, often showed to the king), but inspired by these verses, kneeling and prostration were adopted in the early church; while prostration is generally no longer featured, kneeling has remained an important element of Christian worship to this day.

Three of the gifts are explicitly identified in Matthew - gold, frankincense and myrrh - and have become one of the best known items from Matthew; it is often assumed that these three are the only gifts the Magi are described as giving. (It has been suggested by biblical scholars that the "gold" was in fact in a medicinal form rather than as metal.) They are often linked to chapter 60 of the Book of Isaiah and to Psalm 72. Both of these report gifts being given by kings, and this has played a central role in the inaccurate perception of the magi as kings, rather than as astronomer-priests. In a hymn of the late 4th-century Iberian poet Prudentius, the three gifts have already gained their medieval interpretation as prophetic emblems of Jesus' identity, familiar in the carol "We Three Kings" (John Henry Hopkins, Jr., 1857).

Many different theories of the meaning and symbolism of the gifts have been advanced, since while gold is fairly obviously explained, frankincense, and particularly myrrh, are much more obscure. They generally break down into two groups:

- That they are all ordinary gifts for a king - myrrh being commonly used as an anointing oil, frankincense as a perfume, and gold as a valuable.
- That they are prophetic - gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense (an incense) as a symbol of divine authority, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death. Sometimes this is described more weakly as gold symbolizing virtue, frankincense symbolizing prayer, and myrrh symbolizing suffering.

John Chrysostom suggested that the gifts were fit to be given not just to a king but to God, and contrasted them with the Jews' traditional offerings of sheep and calves, and accordingly, Chrysostom asserts that the magi worshipped Jesus as God. This is, however, unlikely, since the magi were magi - a type of zoroastrian priest. C.S. Mann has advanced the theory that the items were not actually brought as gifts, but were rather the tools of the magi, who typically would be astrologer-priests. Mann thus sees the giving of these items to Jesus as showing that the magi were abandoning their practices by relinquishing the necessary tools of their trade, though Brown disagrees with this theory since the portrayal of the magi had been wholly positive up to this point with no hint of condemnation. An alternative reading on the same lines is that the magi gave the tools of their craft to Jesus to acknowledge him as one of

them; magi were near universally regarded at the time as being particularly wise, partly owing to their dedication to astrology, and the perception that zoroastrians were always honest, owing to their religion, and hence by adding magi endorsing Jesus as their equal, the author of Matthew was seeking to raise Jesus' own standing.

The gifts themselves have also been criticized as mostly useless to a poor carpenter as his family, and this is often the target of comic satire in television and other comedy. Clarke states that the deist Thomas Woolston once quipped that *if they had brought sugar, soap, and candles they would have acted like wise men*. What subsequently happened to these gifts is never mentioned in the scripture, but several traditions have developed. One story has the gold being stolen by the two thieves who were later crucified alongside Jesus. Another tale has it being entrusted to and then misappropriated by Judas. Another story is that the family quickly pawned/sold them and later used the money to finance their flight to Egypt.

In the Monastery of St. Paul of Mount Athos there is a 15th century golden case containing purportedly the Gift of the Magi. It was donated to the monastery in the 15th century by Maro, daughter of the King of Serbia George Vragovitch, wife to the Ottoman Sultan Murat II and godmother to Mehmet II the Conqueror (of Constantinople). Apparently they were part of the relics of the Holy Palace of Constantinople and it is claimed they were displayed there since the 4th century AD. After the Athens Earthquake of September 9, 1999 they were temporarily displayed in Athens in order to strengthen faith and raise money for earthquake victims.

At this point the magi leave the narrative by *returning another way* so as to avoid Herod, and do not reappear. Gregory the Great waxed lyrical on this theme, commenting that *having come to know Jesus we are forbidden to return by the way we came*. There are many traditional stories about what happened to the magi after this, with one having them baptised by St. Thomas on his way to India. Another has their remains found by Saint Helena and brought to Constantinople, and eventually making their way to Germany and the Shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne Cathedral. Marco Polo in his writings claimed that he saw their perfectly preserved bodies in Saveh in Persia on his journeys.

## Herod

When the magi first enquire about Jesus, Matthew says that they were overheard by "Herod the King", who is accepted to refer to Herod the Great who died in 4 BC. This is seemingly in contradiction with Luke's mention of a census and of Quirinius being governor of Syria, which both apply to some time after 6 A.D. The magi claim to wish to *pay homage* (*proskunesai* in the Greek) to a *King of the Jews*. While *proskunesai* can mean honouring either a king or a God, *King of the Jews* is a clear and direct challenge to Herod's authority. Herod was renowned for his paranoia, killing several of his own sons who threatened him. As an Edomite, Herod would be especially threatened by a Davidic heir, who would automatically be more in favour with Jewish fundamentalists of the time, who had a particularly xenophobic attitude.

Why all Jerusalem should be troubled by an opponent to Herod is a more important question. Throughout this chapter Matthew shows the leaders of Jerusalem allied with Herod against Jesus, and so these passages have often been quoted in support of Christian anti-Semitism. That all Jerusalem is agitated also seems to conflict with later passages in the same



Gospel, where the people are quite oblivious to Jesus' existence. Gundry sees this passage as influenced by the politics of the time it was written, as a foreshadowing of the rejection of Jesus and his church by the leaders of Jerusalem. Brown notes that another option, supported even in ancient times by John Chrysostom, is that Matthew is trying to portray Jesus as a new Moses; in Exodus all Egypt is troubled by Moses, not just the Pharaoh. Levin believes in a third option which sees Matthew as presenting a class war throughout his Gospel, with Jesus on the side of the poor and nomadic, against powerful city dwellers.

Most scholars take the reference to *all the chief priests and scribes* as referring to the Sanhedrin, however, there is a difficulty in taking this literally as there was only one chief priest at the time, so all the chief priests can only literally refer to a single individual. Taking it less literally, Brown notes that this phrase occurs in other contemporary documents, and refers to the leading priests and former chief priests, not only the current head of the priesthood. A more important difficulty with this passage is its historical implausibility, since records from the period show that Herod and the Sanhedrin were sharply divided, and their relations acrimonious. At the time the priests were largely Sadducees while the scribes were mostly Pharisees, thus both groups being present might be a deliberate attempt to tar both leading Jewish factions as being involved with Herod. Schweizer states that Herod consulting with the Sanhedrin is *historically almost inconceivable*, and he views their presence in the passage merely as a literary device to have someone able to subsequently quote an Old Testament prophecy.

After having consulted with these religious individuals, Herod is described as secretly meeting with the magi, which while fitting with Herod's paranoid nature, does beg the question of how Matthew could possibly have known that the events took place. Subsequently, Herod is described as sending the magi to Bethlehem to discover where Jesus is, so that he can *worship* him. Many scholars, such as Brown and Schweizer, find it improbable for this passage to be factual; Bethlehem is only five miles from Jerusalem and it is thus odd that Herod would need to use foreign priests that he had only just met for such an important task, trusting them implicitly despite his usual paranoia, even though he could easily give the task to his soldiers or others more trusted by him. France defends the historicity of this story, theorising that soldiers might alarm the villagers, making it difficult to find the infant, though searching a village only five miles away, even with deeply distrusting villagers, isn't that difficult a task when you have an entire army at your disposal. France has also proposed that Herod chose the magi to carry the task out since they were more likely to be gullible, as foreigners, or at least have less qualms than Jewish soldiers would about killing someone supposedly fitting a Jewish prophecy.

## The birthplace

This narrative of the visit of the Magi is the first point in Matthew that Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' birth, is mentioned. That it is specified as being in Judea is ascribed by Albright and Mann to emphasise that it isn't the northern town also named Bethlehem (probably the modern town of Beit Lahna), though other scholars feel the main purpose of this mention is to assert that Jesus was born in the heart of Judaism and not in the unrespected backwater that was Galilee. According to the chronology in Luke, the family left Bethlehem soon after arriving, when Jesus was forty days old, but according to Matthew, the Magi visited Jesus in

Bethlehem when he was at a *house*. This raises the question of how the family has its own home in the town when the magi visit, having only been able to have a stable when Jesus was born.

Most modern scholars believe that the author of Matthew is fairly clear in this chapter that the family had lived for some time in the town, and was likely originally from Bethlehem, thus it is logical for them to have a house. This reading does contradict Luke's story of the emergency trip to the town, however, a view which those who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible naturally do not feel able to support. These inerrantists instead believe that either that the couple found a house very quickly, i.e. in less than forty days, while Mary had only just given birth, or that, contrary to the views of almost all scholars of linguistics, *house* should be translated instead as *village*. Those not willing to accept that one of the two gospels is outright wrong, but still willing to accept that Matthew and Luke cannot be exactly synchronised, generally feel that the magi visited several months after the birth of Jesus, and Luke has got wrong the length of time that the family stayed in Bethlehem.

Another theory is that the Magi visited about two years after the birth of Jesus, explaining why Herod, thwarted in his plans, to later order the death of children aged two years and below to be slaughtered. For many, especially believers in inerrancy, this settles the seeming contradiction.

### The star of Bethlehem



The Journey of the Magi by James Tissot

The magi are described as having followed a star, which traditionally became known as the Star of Bethlehem, since that is where it led them to. Since at least Kepler there has been much work to try and link it to an astronomical event, with the most common cited being a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC, fitting in with Matthew's chronology pointing to Jesus being born before 4 B.C., unlike Luke's which points to 6 A.D.. Although traditionally the magi are described as having seen a *star in the east*, the Greek word in question is *anatole*, which many scholars feel more accurately translates as a *star rising*.

John Chrysostom rejected the idea that the Star of Bethlehem was a normal star or similar heavenly body, because such a star could not have specified the exact cave and manger where Jesus was found, being too high in the sky to be that specific. Also, he notes that stars in the sky move from east to west, but that the magi would have travelled from north to south to arrive in Palestine from Persia. Instead, Chrysostom suggested that the Star was a more miraculous occurrence, comparable to the pillar of cloud mentioned in Exodus as leading the Israelites out of Egypt. In the Byzantine tradition, influenced by Chrysostom's writing and palace etiquette, the star was interpreted as a palace official that led the foreign dignitaries to the king, and as such is depicted in Byzantine art

In Matthew 2:9 it states that the star *came and stood over* where Jesus was, seemingly stating that the star pointed out the specific house or village that Jesus was in. Quite how it did this is unspecified in the text, and artists have portrayed a wide array of means. Hill comments that the star *standing over* a fixed location is an undeniably miraculous action which defies all attempts to rationalize the star as a natural nova or conjunction. However, it is perfectly possible for a previously moving star or conjunction to appear to halt its location in the sky - the sun freezes in its annual north-south motion for three days twice a year, at the winter and summer solstice (co-incidentally due to precession of the equinoxes, 25 December was the winter solstice at the time).

Astronomer Michael R. Molnar and others have taken the view that Matthew's statements that the star "went before" and "stood over" are terms that refer respectively to the retrogradation and stationing of the royal "wandering star" Jupiter. If Molnar's research is correct, this would require the birth to have taken place on 17 April, 6 BC, and the *standing over* on 19 December, and the magi would have had to arrive at some point thereafter.

At the time the notion of new stars as beacons of major events were common, being reported for such figures as Alexander the Great, Mithridates, Abraham, and Augustus. Pliny even takes time to rebut a theory that every person has a star that rises when they are born and fades when they die, evidence that this was believed by some. According to Brown, to many at the time it would have been unthinkable that a messiah could have been born without some stellar portents beforehand.

According to John Mosley, the program supervisor for Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles, the key question is whether the account refers to "stars" or "planets". The distinction is not likely to have been meaningful to astrologers like the Magi in the first century AD. If it was a planet then there are a number of celestial events that would have attracted the interest and fascination of anyone, like the Magi, who followed the stars. Mosley argued:

- Historical records and modern-day computer simulations indicate that there was a rare series of planetary groupings, also known as conjunctions, during the years 3 B.C. and 2 B.C.
- On the morning of June 12 in 3 BC Venus could be sighted very close to Saturn in the eastern sky
- On August 12 in 3 BC there was a spectacular pairing of Venus and Jupiter in the constellation of Leo, which ancient astrologers associated with the destiny of the Jews

- Between September in 3 BC and June in 2 BC, Jupiter's retrograde motion caused it to appear to deviate from its path and loop around Regulus, a star in Leo. Astrologers considered Jupiter the kingly planet and regarded Regulus as the king star. This ties in with evidence of an October birthdate for Jesus.
- On June 17 in 2 BC, Jupiter could be sighted so close to Venus that with a naked eye they appeared to have merged
- On December 28 in 3 BC, all the planets formed the shape of the Star of David.

Mosley's claims have been disputed by several astronomers as contrived, and inaccurate, for example, his claim that a cross shaped arrangement of the planets was the star fails to appreciate that the cross only became considered a Christian symbol in the 6th century. David Turner, professor of astronomy at St Mary's University, has argued extensively against Mosley's conclusions, and has stated that some of the claims are extremely *tenuous*. The date of Herod's death is generally accepted to be 5-4 BC, which would be before these astronomical events of 3-2 B.C. In other words, Jesus was born, the Magi visited Herod, and went to Jesus, Herod caused Jesus to flee, and only then did the stars begin an astronomical event that had highly symbolic significance; suggesting that if that was indeed an event indicating the Messiah's birth, then the Messiah was an unknown individual born 1-2 years after Jesus.

Some Christians have had difficulty with reference to the star as elsewhere in the Bible astrology is condemned, a view shared by most fundamentalist Christians. Consequently, R.T. France has argued that the passage is not an endorsement of astrology, but rather an illustration of how God takes care in *meeting individuals where they are*.

Other Christians interpret the star as a fulfilment of the "Star Prophecy" in the Book of Numbers:

*There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth* - Numbers 24:17

## The Bethlehem prophecy

The text describes the magi explaining to Herod about the purpose of their visit by use of a quote from *the prophet*:

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times* - Micah 5:1-3 (according to the Masoretic text)

The quotation given in Matthew is from the Book of Micah (5:1-3), though it differs substantially from both the Septuagint and Masoretic texts of the same passage. The Septuagint and Masoretic refer to Bethlehem as *Bethlehem Ephratah*, which Matthew alters to *Bethlehem, land of Judah*, apparently to further emphasise that Jesus was born in Judea not Galilee, where he spent much of his ministry, an area that was viewed by most religious Jews as being *unclean* and lower than the *half-cast* people in the intermediate region. An even more important change is the almost total inversion of the meaning - Micah has *you are little among the thousands of Judah* whereas Matthew's quote of it has *you are not least among the princes of Judah*.

Matthew also replaces the word *ruler* with *shepherd*, apparently to present the argument that a messiah would be a religious figure rather than a political one. The portion of Micah where this quote is found is clearly discussing a messiah and states that like King David, the messiah would originate from Bethlehem. At the time it was not widely accepted that the messiah would necessarily be born in Bethlehem, just that his ancestors would have been, and thus it was not considered essential for a messiah to be someone born in that town, although it was considered a reasonable area for one to happen to originate from. Certainly far more reasonable than the peripheral area of Galilee where Jesus grew up.

## Religious significance

According to most forms of Christianity, the Magi were the first religious figures to worship Christ, and for this reason the story of the Magi is particularly respected and popular among many Christians. The visit of the Magi is commemorated by Catholics and other Christian sects (but not the Eastern Orthodox) on the observance of Epiphany, January 6. The Eastern Orthodox celebrate it on December 25 along with Christmas. This visit is frequently treated in Christian art and literature as *The Journey of the Magi*.

Upon this kernel of information Christians embroidered many circumstantial details about the magi. One of the most important changes was their rising from astrologers to kings. The general view is that this is linked to Old Testament prophecies that have the messiah being worshipped by kings in Isaiah 60:3, Psalm 72:10, and Psalms 68:29. Early readers reinterpreted Matthew in light of these prophecies and elevated the magi to kings. Mark Allan Powell rejects this view. He argues that the idea of the magi as kings arose considerably later in the time after Constantine and the change was made to endorse the role of Christian monarchs. By 500 A.D. all commentators adopted the prevalent tradition of the three were kings, and this continued until the Protestant Reformation.

Though the Qur'an omits Matthew's episode of the magi, it was well known in Arabia. The Muslim encyclopaedist al-Tabari, writing in the 9th century, gives the familiar symbolism of the gifts of the magi; he gives as his source the later 7th century writer Wahb ibn Munabbih. [\[1\]](#)

This positive interpretation of the Magi is not unopposed. The Jehovah's Witnesses [\[2\]](#) do not see the arrival of the Magi as something to be celebrated, but instead stress the Biblical condemnation of sorcery and astrology in such texts as Deuteronomy 18:10-11, Leviticus 19:26, and Isaiah 47:13-14. They also point to the fact that the star seen by the Magi led them first to a hostile enemy of Jesus, Herod, and only then to the child's location - the argument being that if this was an event from God, it makes no sense for them to be led to a ruler with intentions to kill the child before taking them to Jesus.

## Traditions of the Epiphany

- Holidays celebrating the arrival of the magi traditionally recognise a sharp distinction between the date of their arrival and the date of Jesus' birth. Matthew's introduction of the magi gives the reader no reason to believe that they were present on the night of the birth, instead stating that they arrived at

some point *after* Jesus had been born, and the magi are described as leading Herod to assume that Jesus is up to 1 year old.

- Christianity celebrates the Magi on the day of Epiphany, January 6, the last of the twelve days of Christmas, particularly in the Spanish-speaking parts of the world. In these Spanish-speaking areas, the three kings (*Sp. "los Reyes Magos de Oriente"*, also "Los Tres Reyes Magos", receive wish letters from children and magically bring them gifts on the night before Epiphany. According to the tradition, the Magi come from the Orient on their camels to visit the houses of all the children; much like the Northern European Santa Claus with his reindeer, they visit everyone in one night. In some areas, children prepare a drink for each of the Magi, it is also traditional to prepare food and drink for the camels, because this is the only night of the year when they eat.
- Spanish cities organize cabalgatas in the evening, in which the *kings* and their *servants* parade and throw sweets to the children (and parents) in attendance. The *cavalcade of the three kings* in Alcoi claims to be the oldest in the world; the participants who portray the kings and pages walk through the crowd, giving presents to the children directly.
- In France, the holiday on January 6 is celebrated with a special tradition: within a family, a cake is baked which contains one single bean. Whoever gets the bean is "crowned" king for the remainder of the holiday.

## The Magi depicted in art

The Magi most frequently appear in European art in the *Adoration of the Magi*; less often *The Journey of the Magi* has been a popular *topos*. More generally they appear in popular [Nativity scenes](#) and other [Christmas](#) decorations that have their origins in the Neapolitan variety of the Italian *presepio* or Nativity crèche; they are featured in Menotti's opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and in several [Christmas carols](#), of which the best-known English one is "We Three Kings". Artists have also allegorised the theme to represent the three ages of man. Since the Age of Discoveries, the Kings also represent three parts of the world in western art. Balthasar is thus represented as a young African or Moor and Caspar may be depicted with distinctive Oriental features. In Orthodox Art they are depicted as Persians

An early Anglo-Saxon picture survives on the Franks Casket, probably a non-Christian king's hoard-box (early 7th century, whalebone carving); or rather the hoard-box survived Christian attacks on non-Christian art and sculpture because of that picture.<sup>[3]</sup> In its composition it follows the oriental style, which renders a courtly scene, with the Virgin and Christ facing the spectator, while the Magi devoutly approach from the (left) side. Even amongst non-Christians who had heard of the Christian story of the Magi, the motif was quite popular, since the Magi had endured a long journey and were generous. Instead of an angel, the picture places a swan, interpretable as the hero's fylgia (a protecting spirit, and shapeshifter).

In the film Donovan's Reef, a Christmas play is held in French Polynesia. However, instead of the traditional correspondence of Magi to continents, the version for Polynesian Catholics features the *king of Polynesia*, the *king of America*, and the *king of China*.

Further sentimental narrative detail was added in the novel and movie *Ben-Hur*, where Balthasar appears as an old man, who goes back to Palestine to see the former child Jesus become an adult.

According to Howard Clarke, in the United States, [Christmas cards](#) featuring magi outsell those with shepherds.

In Michael Ende's children books *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* and *Jim Button and the Wild 13*, one of the Three Kings plays a major role in one of the main character's background.

## See also

- [Saint Nicholas](#)

## Cultural References

- In the video game Chrono Trigger, the three wise men: Belthasar, Gaspar, and Melchior help the main characters in various ways throughout their journey through time in order to stop the destruction caused by Lavos.
- In the TV Anime Neon Genesis Evangelion, the names of the three supercomputers in NERV correspond to the three Magi.

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## Caganer



A traditional Catalan caganer from the front.

A **Caganer** (IPA: [kY.<sup>3</sup>Y.'ne]) is a little statue unique to Catalonia, and neighbouring areas with Catalan culture such as Andorra.

In Catalonia, as in most of Italy, South France and Spain, the traditional Christmas decoration is a large model of the city of Bethlehem, similar to American [Nativity scenes](#) that encompasses the entire city rather than just the typical manger scene. The Catalans have added an extra character that is not found in the manger scenes of any other culture. In addition to Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the Shepherds and company, Catalans have the character known as the *Caganer*. This extra little character is often tucked away in some corner of the model, typically nowhere near the manger scene, where he is not easily noticed. There is a good reason for his obscure position in the display, for "caganer" translates from Catalan to English as "defecator", and that is exactly what this little statue is doing — defecating.





A traditional Catalan caganer from the back.

The reasons for placing a man who is in the act of excreting solid waste from his posterior in a scene which is widely considered holy are as follows:

1. Just tradition.
2. Scatological humor.
3. Finding the Caganer is a fun game, especially for children.
4. The Caganer, by creating feces, is fertilizing the Earth. However, this is probably an a posteriori explanation, and nobody would say they put the Caganer on the Nativity scene for this reason.
5. The Caganer represents the equality of all people e.g. regardless of status, race, gender everyone defecates.

The exact origin of the Caganer is lost, but the tradition has existed since the 18th century. Originally, the Caganer was portrayed as a Catalan peasant wearing a traditional hat called a *barretina* — a red stocking hat with a black band.

The Catalans have modified this tradition somewhat since the 1940s. In addition to the traditional caganer design, you can easily find other characters assuming the caganer position, such as nuns, devils, [Santa Claus](#), celebrities, athletes, historical figures, politicians, Spanish royalty, and other famous people past and present, including Pope John Paul II, Salvador Dalí, prime minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Princess Letizia and even Osama bin Laden.

The practice is tolerated by the local Catholic church. Caganers are easiest to find before Christmas in holiday markets, like the one in front of the Cathedral of Santa Eulalia, which has tables and tables of caganers. Caganers have even been featured in art exhibits.

The caganer is not the only defecating character in the Catalan Christmas tradition—another is the [Tió de Nadal](#), which also makes extensive use of the image of human waste production. Other mentions of feces and defecation are common in Catalan folklore. One popular Catalan phrase before eating says "menja bé, caga fort!" (*Eat well, shit strong!*).

Synonyms in other languages/cultures:

- In Dutch / Flemish : Kakkers / Schijterkes
- In French : Père la Colique
- In German : Choleramännchen or Hinterlader

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## Christkind

The **Christkind** ("Christ Child") is the traditional [Christmas](#) giftbringer in Southern Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Liechtenstein.

Originally invented by Martin Luther, explicitly to discourage the figure of [St. Nicholas](#), it was adopted in Catholic areas during the 19th century, while it began to be gradually replaced by the secular Weihnachtsmann ("Father Christmas") in Protestant regions.

The Christkind is a sprite-like child, usually depicted with blond hair and angelic wings. Martin Luther intended it to be a reference to the incarnation of Jesus as an infant. It is presumed by some to be so, but seems to be rooted in the Alsatian-born myth of a child bringing gifts to the baby Jesus. Children never see the Christkind, as parents will always tell them that the Christkind just disappeared before they came.

Since the 1990s, the Christkind is facing increasing competition from the Weihnachtsmann in the American version of [Santa Claus](#), simply for the reason that adults dressing up as Santa Claus can be hired to stand in front of department stores, other than the Christkind, which is supposed to be a child and very elusive.

### See also

- [Kris Kringle](#) a similar figure

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## Companions of Saint Nicholas

The **Companions of Saint Nicholas** (or [Father Christmas](#)) are a group of closely related figures who accompany [St. Nicholas](#) in many European traditions. The tradition is particularly strong amongst the Germanic peoples, with some regional expression in America (largely from European ethnic groups).

The most recognized companion, especially outside of Europe, is *Knecht Ruprecht*, which translates as *Farmhand Ruprecht* or *Servant Ruprecht*. Other companions include *Krampus* (Austria, Bavaria), *Klaubauf* (Bavaria), *Bartel* (Styria), *Pelzebock*, *Pelznickel*, *Belsnickel* (Pennsylvania), *Schmutzli* (Switzerland), *Rumpelklas*, *Bellzebub*, *Hans Muff*, *Drapp* or

Buzebergt (Augsburg), and Père Fouettard (Northern France). These servants are often associated with, but are distinct from Saint Nicholas' helpers in the Netherlands and Flanders (called Zwarte Piet or *Zwarte Peter*, meaning *Black Pete(r)* in English).

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## Appearance

Often the subject of winter poems and tales, the Companions travel with [St. Nicholas](#) or his various equivalents ([Father Christmas](#), [Santa Claus](#)), carrying with them a rod (sometimes a stick, bundle of switches or a whip, and in modern times often a broom) and a sack. They are sometimes dressed in black rags, bearing a black face and unruly black hair. In many contemporary portrayals the companions look like dark, sinister, or rustic versions of Nicholas himself, with a similar costume but with a darker color scheme.

Some of the companions take on more monstrous forms. Krampus and Klaubauf are variously depicted as horned, shaggy, bestial, or demonic. In many depictions the Krampus looks like popular images of the Devil, complete with red skin, cloven hooves, and short horns.

It is unclear whether the various companions of St. Nicholas are all expressions of a single tradition (likely Knecht Ruprecht), or a conflation of multiple traditions. Various texts, especially those outside the tradition, often treat the companions as variations on a single Knecht Ruprecht tradition.

## Tales

Knecht Ruprecht is commonly cited as a servant and helper, and is sometimes associated with Saint Rupert. According to some stories, Ruprecht began as a farmhand; in others, he is a wild foundling whom St. Nicholas raises from childhood. Ruprecht sometimes walks with a limp, because of a childhood injury. Often, his black clothes and dirty face are attributed to the soot he collects as he goes down chimneys.

The companion of the French St. Nicholas, Pere Fouettard, is said to be the butcher of three children. St. Nicholas discovered the murder and resurrected the three children. He also shamed Pere Fouettard, who, in repentance, became a servant of St. Nicholas.

## Traditions

In some of the Ruprecht traditions the children would be summoned to the door to perform tricks, such as a dance or singing a song to impress upon Santa and Ruprecht that they were indeed good children. Those who performed badly would be beaten soundly by Servant Ruprecht, and those who performed well were given a gift or some treats. Those who performed badly enough or had committed other misdeeds throughout the year were put into Ruprecht's sack and taken away, variously to Ruprecht's home in the Black Forest, or to be tossed into a river. In other versions the children must be asleep, and would either awake to find their shoes filled with sweets, coal, or in some cases a stick. Over time, other customs developed: parents giving kids who misbehaved a stick instead of treats and saying that it was a warning from Nikolaus that "unless you improve by [Christmas](#) day, Nikolaus' black servant Ruprecht will come and beat you with the stick and you won't get any Christmas gifts." Often there would be variations idiosyncratic to individual families.

In parts of Austria, **Krampusse**, who local tradition says are Nikolaus's helpers (typically children of poor families), roamed the streets and sledding hills during the festival. They wore black rags and masks, dragging chains behind them, and occasionally hurling them towards children in their way. These *Krampusumzüge* (Krampus runs) still exist, although perhaps less violent than in the past.

In parts of the United States in the 19th century, "Pelznickel" traditions were maintained for a time among immigrants at least as far west as the US state of Indiana. In this branch of the tradition, the father or other older male relative was often "busy working outside" or had to see to some matter elsewhere in the house when Pelznickel arrived. Today, remnants of this tradition remain, known as the Belsnickel, especially in Pennsylvania.

## Historical accounts

In some regions, the local priest was informed by the parents about their children's behavior and would then personally visit the homes in the traditional Christian garment and threaten them with rod-beatings.

## Modern perspective

[Christmas Eve](#) (*Heiliger Abend*, "Holy Evening") thus became known as the time when children were best behaved, and the tales of Ruprecht gave a balance to the winter festivals which might seem disquieting to some, but which were not especially grim or atypical of customs of times past. The story is still popular throughout the German-speaking world.

Recently, some effort has been made to spark a KrampusNacht tradition in San Francisco. The originators embrace the mischievous interpretation of Krampus, including some hedonistic and antisocial aspects inherent in the tradition.

## Controversy

Traditionally, Knecht Ruprecht would sometimes be portrayed as being African, like Zwarte Piet in the Benelux. However, over time this caused controversy and today he is usually portrayed as Caucasian, and the black on his face is explained as soot collected as he descends into chimneys.

## References

*"Do you have the Sack with you?"*

*I spoke: "the Sack, that is here;  
because apples, nut and almond core  
eat pious children gladly."*

*"Do you have the rod also with you?"*

*I spoke: "the rod, it is here;  
but for the children, only the bad,  
those it meets them right, upon their part."*

(translated excerpt of 'Farmhand Ruprecht' by Theodor Storm)

The Krampus was also featured on the television cartoon series The Venture Bros. In a short Christmas episode, the Krampus is accidentally released from a book of ancient occult magic and wreaks havoc on Dr. Venture. The demon is soothed by a small nativity scene set. At the end of the episode this is all revealed to be a hallucination by Dr. Venture brought on by a head injury.

In the arcade game CarnEvil, the boss for the "Rickety Town" level is named Krampus. He resembles a horned, clawed, demonic [Santa Claus](#) clad in green, and attacks by hurling flaming coals.

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## Ded Moroz

In the culture of the eastern Slavs the traditional character **Ded Moroz** (Russian: 54 >@>7) plays a role similar to that of [Santa Claus](#). The literal translation of the name would be **Grandfather Frost**. However, English-speakers traditionally translate his name as **Father Frost**.

Ded Moroz brings presents to children. However, unlike the clandestine ways of Santa Claus, he brings them in person, at the celebrations of the New Year, at New Year parties for

kids by the New Year Tree. Ded Moroz is accompanied by Snegurochka (Russian: Снегурочка), or 'Snow Maiden', his granddaughter.

The traditional appearance of Ded Moroz has a close resemblance to that of Santa Claus, with his red coat, boots and long white beard. Specifically, Ded Moroz wears a heel-long red fur coat, a semi-round fur hat, and white valenki or high boots (sapogi), silver or red with silver ornament. Unlike Santa Claus, he walks with a long magical staff, does not say "Ho, ho, ho", and drives no reindeer.

The official residence of Ded Moroz in Russia is the town of Veliky Ustyug. The residence of the Belarusian [Dzied Maroz](#) is in Belavezhskaya Pushcha.

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## History

His roots are in pagan beliefs, but since 19th century his attributes and legend were shaped under literary influences. He, together with Snegurochka, were "fleshed out" from a kind of a winter sprite into what he is now. The fairy tale play Snegurochka by the famous Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky was influential in this respect, followed by Rimsky-Korsakov's Snegurochka with libretto based on the play.

Only by the end of the 19th century did Ded Moroz win a "competition" between the various mythical figures who were in charge of New Year presents: Grandfather Nicholas, Santa Claus, Ded Treskun, Morozko, simply Moroz, etc. He perfectly fits the Russian traditions, so that there was a widespread opinion that he has been known to Russians for centuries.

After the Russian Revolution, when in 1920s Bolsheviks started to wage a campaign against religion and superstitions, Ded Moroz and the New Year Tree were banned in 1928, and Ded Moroz was declared "an ally of the priest and kulak".[1]. Joseph Stalin restored the tradition in 1935, after the recommendation of Pavel Postyshev, who had considered the traditions as a tool with which to fight both Christianity and to mobilize the workers.[1] In 1937, Ded Moroz for the first time arrived at the Moscow Palace of Unions. Since this time, an invitation to the New Year Tree at the Palace of Unions became a matter of honor for Soviet children. Several times, the coat of Ded Moroz was changed to not be confused with

Santa Claus; it was made blue. Joseph Stalin ordered Palace of Unions' Ded Morozes to wear only blue coats.

## Regional differences

### ex-USSR

There are equivalents of Ded Moroz and Snegurochka all over the former USSR, as well as the countries once in the so-called Soviet bloc.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the person who brings New Year's gifts to kids of all religions is called Djeda Mraz in Bosnian, much alike 540 @07 (Deda Mraz) in Serbia or 04> @07 (Djado Mraz) in Bulgaria. In Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the name is 54> @07 (Dedo Mraz), and in Serbian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Montenegro, the variation of this person's name is Ijekavian Serbian X540 @07 (Djeda Mraz), like in Bosnian. In Croati his name is Djed Mraz or Deda Mraz He wears red clothes, just like [Father Christmas](#), but he's not always fat.

### Slovenia

In Slovenia he is called *Dedek Mraz* and is also quite different in appearance from the american Santa Claus. He is slim and wears a grey coat and a round fur cap.

### Poland

While there is no traditional analog of Ded Moroz in Polish folklore, there was an attempt to introduce him as Dziadek Mróz during the communist period. In the People's Republic of Poland the figure Dziadek Mróz was used in propaganda, since the traditional Zwity MikoBaj ([Saint Nicholas](#), the Polish [Santa Claus](#)) was determined to be "ideologically hostile", as part of the campaign against religion, which included elimination of [Christmas](#) in favor of New Year. Often officials insisted on using the figure in Polish schools and preschools during celebrations and events for Polish children, instead of Santa Claus in order to give impression of traditional cultural links with Soviet Russia. Despite those efforts, Dziadek Mróz never gained any popular support among the Polish people, and after the fall of communism he disappeared from Poland.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Germany

The **Väterchen Frost** ("Old Father Frost") character of German folklore is also closely related to the tradition of Ded Moroz, some simularities Ded Moroz also shares with French [Père Noël](#) (Grandfather January).

## Tatar

In Tatar language he is known as Q1\_ Babay/KH 0109 (Winter Grandfather) and is accompanied by Qar Q1z1/0@ K7K (Snow Girl).

## See also

- [Mo Geril](#) (in Romania)
- [Christmas in Eastern Europe](#)

## References

1. ^ a b Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*, Indiana University Press, 200, ISBN 0-253-33768-2, [Google Print](#), p.85
2. ^\*(Polish) [Dziadek Mróz against Saint Nicholas](#), last accessed on 11 May 2006

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## Dzied Maroz

**Dzied Maroz** (Belarusian: 754 0@>7, Dzied Maróz, *literally* "Grandfather Frost") is the Belarusian analogue of Russian [Ded Moroz](#). His official residence is located in BieBavieskaja Puš a.

Unlike in Russia, in Belarus dzied Maroz is not a traditional character and is never mentioned in national folklore. This character was introduced during Soviet times in order to replace the traditional Zviaty MikaBaj ([Saint Nicholas](#)), whom the anti-religious Soviet government considered inappropriate. Unlike Zviaty MikaBaj, who was coming on Christmas, Dzied Maroz was a New Year guest. All his habits and looks were borrowed from Russian traditions, with Belarusian ones being abandoned.

The new character was adopted by the people, although it took much longer in rural areas.

Although some people are making attempts to bring Zviaty MikaBaj back, Dzied Maroz remains to be the popular winter holiday character, mainly because most people are familiar with Soviet customs, and know almost nothing about Belarusian national traditions.

## See also

- [Ded Moroz](#)

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# Elf

An **elf** is a mythical creature of Germanic mythology/paganism which still survives in northern European folklore. In Norse mythology they were originally a race of minor gods of nature and fertility. Elves are often pictured as youthful-seeming men and women of great beauty living in forests and other natural places, underground, or in wells and springs. They have been portrayed to be long-lived or immortal and they have magical powers attributed to them. Following the success of J. R. R. Tolkien's epic work *The Lord of the Rings*—wherein a wise, angelic people named Elves play a significant role—they have become staple characters of modern fantasy.

*Elf* can be pluralized both as *elves* and *elfs*. Something associated with elves or the qualities of elves is described by the adjectives *elven*, *elvish*, *elfin* or *elfish*. A convention of modern fantasy usage is: the *v* in *elven* or *elvish* refers to human-sized *elves* (who correspond more closely to the mythology of the Viking Era), whereas the *f* in *elfin* or *elfish* refers to tiny-sized *elfs* (who correspond more closely to the folklore of the Renaissance and Romantic Eras). They are also called:

- Germany: *Elfen*, *Elben*
- Great Britain: *addler* (obsolete)
- Netherlands: *Elfen*, *Alfen*, *Elven*
- Denmark: *alfer*, *elvere*, *elverfolk*, *ellefolk* or *huldrer*.
- Iceland: *álfar*, *álfafólk* and *huldufólk* (hidden people)
- Norway: *alver*, *alfer* or *elvefolk*
- Sweden: *alfer*, *alver* or *älvor* (Älvor translates to fairies)
- Spanish: "elfo"

After much debate, the consensus is *elf*, *álf* and related words derive from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*albh* meaning "white", whence also the Latin *albus* "white", whence Portuguese and English *albino*.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

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## Characteristics of Traditional Elves

### Elves in Norse mythology

The earliest preserved description of elves comes from Norse mythology. In Old Norse they are called *álfar* (singular, nominative case: *álfr*), and although no older or contemporary descriptions exist, the appearance of beings etymologically related to *álfar* in various later folklore strongly suggests that the belief in elves was common among all the Germanic tribes, and not limited solely to the ancient Scandinavians.

Elves make various appearances in Norse mythology. Although the concept itself is never clearly defined in our sources, elves appear to have been understood as powerful and beautiful human-sized beings. They are commonly referred to collectively as semi-divine beings associated with fertility as well as the cult of the ancestors. As such, elves appear similar to the animistic belief in spirits of nature and of the deceased, common to nearly all human religions; something that, on a side note, is true also for the Old Norse belief in *fylgjur* and *vörðar* ("follower" and "warden" spirits, respectively). Arguably, elves are the Germanic equivalent to the nymphs of Greek and Roman mythology, as well as the *vili* and *rusalki* of Slavic mythology.



The god Freyr, the lord of the light-elves

The Icelandic mythographer and historian Snorri Sturluson seems to have referred to dwarves (*dvergar*) as "dark-elves" (*dökkálfar*) or "black-elves" (*svartálfar*); whether this usage reflects wider medieval Scandinavian belief is uncertain.[3] Elves who are not dark-elves are referred to by Snorri as "light-elves" (*ljósálfar*); this usage has often been connected

with elves' etymological connection with whiteness. Snorri describes their differences like so (Gylfaginning 17, Prose Edda):

"There is one place there [in the sky] that is called the Elf Home (*Álfheimr*). People live there that are named the light elves (*Ljósálfar*). But the dark elves (*dökkálfar*) live below in earth, and they are unlike them in appearance – and more unlike them in reality. The Light Elves are brighter than the sun in appearance, but the Dark Elves are blacker than pitch."

*"Sá er einn staðr þar, er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat, er Ljósálfar heita, en Dökkálfar búa niðri í jörðu, ok eru þeir ólíkir þeim sýnum ok miklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en Dökkálfar eru svartari en bik."* <sup>[4]</sup>

Evidence for elves in Norse mythology outside Snorri's work, and in earlier evidence, comes from Skaldic poetry, the Poetic Edda and legendary sagas. Here elves are linked with the Æsir, particularly through the common phrase "Æsir and the elves", which presumably means "all the gods".<sup>[5]</sup> The elves have been compared or identified with the Vanir (fertility gods) by some scholars.<sup>[6]</sup> However, in the *Alvissmál* ("The Sayings of All-Wise"), the elves are considered distinct from both the Vanir and the Æsir, as revealed by a series of comparative names in which Æsir, Vanir, and elves are given their own versions for various words in a reflection of their individual racial preferences. Possibly, the words designate a difference in status between the major fertility gods (the Vanir) and the minor ones (the elves). *Grímnismál* relates that the Van Freyr was the lord of *Álfheimr* (meaning "elf-world"), the home of the light-elves. *Lokasenna* relates that a large group of Æsir and elves had assembled at Ægir's court for a banquet. Several minor forces, the servants of gods, are presented such as Byggvir and Beyla, who belonged to Freyr, the lord of the elves, and they were probably elves, since they were not counted among the gods. Two other mentioned servants were Fimafeng (who was murdered by Loki) and Eldir.

Some speculate that Vanir and elves belong to an earlier Nordic Bronze Age religion of Scandinavia, and were later replaced by the Æsir as main gods. Others (most notably Georges Dumézil) argue that the Vanir were the gods of the common Norsemen, and the Æsir those of the priest and warrior castes (see also Nerthus).

A poem from around 1020, the *Austrfaravísur* ('Eastern-journey verses') of Sigvatr Þorðarson, mentions that, as a Christian, he was refused board in a heathen household, in Sweden, because an *álfablót* ("elves' sacrifice") was being conducted there. However, we have no further reliable information as to what an *álfablót* involved,<sup>[7]</sup> but like other blóts it probably included the offering of foods, and later Scandinavian folklore retained a tradition of sacrificing treats to the elves (see below). From the time of year (close to the autumnal equinox) and the elves' association with fertility and the ancestors, we might assume that it had to do with the ancestor cult and the life force of the family.

In addition to this, *Kormáks saga* accounts for how a sacrifice to elves was apparently believed able to heal a severe battle wound:

*Þorvarð healed but slowly; and when he could get on his feet he went to see Þorðís, and asked her what was best to help his healing.*

*"A hill there is," answered she, "not far away from here, where elves have their haunt. Now get you the bull that Kormák killed, and redden the outer side of the hill with its blood, and make a feast for the elves with its flesh. Then thou wilt be healed."* <sup>[8]</sup>

The Scandinavian elves were of human size. Full-sized famous men could be elevated to the rank of elves after death, such as the petty king Olaf Geirstad-Elf, and the smith hero Völund (titled as "ruler of elves" in the Völundarkviða). Even crossbreeding was possible between elves and humans in the Old Norse belief. One case appears in Hrólfr Kraki's saga, where the Danish king Helgi finds an elf-woman clad in silk who is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. He rapes her and later she bears the daughter Skuld, who married Hjörvard, Hrólfr Kraki's killer. Since Skuld was half-elven, she was very skilled in witchcraft (seiðr), and this to the point that she was almost invincible in battle. When her warriors fell, she made them rise again to continue fighting. The only way to defeat her was to capture her before she could summon her armies, which included elvish warriors[9]. Another case was the hero Högni, whose mother was a human queen, and whose father, according to the Thidrekssaga, was an elf by the name of *Aldrian* (though this text is largely translated from German material).

There are also in the Heimskringla and in Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar accounts of a line of local kings who ruled over Álfheim, corresponding to the modern Swedish province Bohuslän, and since they had elven blood they were said to be more beautiful than most men.

*The land governed by King Alf was called Alfheim, and all his offspring are related to the elves. They were fairer than any other people...*<sup>[10]</sup>

The last king is named *Gandalf*.

## Scandinavian elves



Little älvor, playing with Tomtebobarnen. From *Children of the Forest* (1910) by Swedish author and illustrator Elsa Beskow.

In Scandinavian folklore, which is a later blend of Norse mythology and elements of Christian mythology, an elf is called elver in Danish, alv in Norwegian, and alv or älva in Swedish (the first is masculine, the second feminine). The Norwegian expressions seldom appear in genuine folklore, and when they do, they are always used synonymous to

huldrefolk or vetter, a category of earth-dwelling beings generally held to be more related to Norse dwarves than elves which is comparable to the Icelandic *huldufólk* (hidden people).

In Denmark and Sweden, the elves appear as beings distinct from the vetter, even though the border between them is diffuse. The insect-winged fairies in the folklore of the British Isles are often called "älvor" in modern Swedish or "alfer" in Danish, although the correct translation is "feer." In a similar vein, the alf found in the fairy tale *The Elf of the Rose* by Danish author H. C. Andersen is so tiny that he can have a rose blossom for home, and has "wings that reached from his shoulders to his feet". Yet, Andersen also wrote about elvere in *The Elfin Hill*. The elves in this story are more alike those of traditional Danish folklore, who were beautiful females, living in hills and boulders, capable of dancing a man to death. Like the huldra in Norway and Sweden, they are hollow when seen from the back. Small wingless elves of British folklore also appear distinct, thus Santa's Elves are called "[tomte](#)" in Swedish or "nisse" in Norwegian.

The elves of Norse mythology have survived into folklore mainly as females, living in hills and mounds of stones<sup>[11]</sup> (cf. Galadriel's account of what would happen to the Elves who remained in Middle-earth). The Swedish älvor<sup>[12]</sup> (sing. älva) were stunningly beautiful girls who lived in the forest with an elven king. They were long-lived and light-hearted in nature. The elves are typically pictured as fair-haired, white-clad and like most creatures in the Scandinavian folklore can be really nasty when offended. In the stories, they often play the role of disease-spirits. The most common, though also most harmless case was various irritating skin rashes, which were called älvablåst (elven blow) and could be cured by a forceful counter-blow (a handy pair of bellows was most useful for this purpose). Skålgropar, a particular kind of petroglyph found in Scandinavia, were known in older times as älvkvarnar (elven mills), pointing to their believed usage. One could appease the elves by offering them a treat (preferably butter) placed into an elven mill – perhaps a custom with roots in the Old Norse *álfablót*.

The elves could be seen dancing over meadows, particularly at night and on misty mornings. They left a kind of circle where they had danced, which were called *älvdanser* (elf dances) or *älvringar* (elf circles), and to urinate in one was thought to cause venereal diseases. Typically, it consisted of a ring of small mushrooms, but there was also another kind of elf circle:

*On lake shores, where the forest met the lake, you could find elf circles. They were round places where the grass had been flattened like a floor. Elves had danced there. By Lake Tisaren,<sup>[13]</sup> I have seen one of those. It could be dangerous and one could become ill if one had trodden over such a place or if one destroyed anything there.<sup>[11]</sup>*

If a human watched the dance of the elves, he would discover that even though only a few hours seemed to have passed, many years had passed in the real world. (This time phenomenon is retold in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* when the Fellowship of the Ring discovers that time seems to have run more slowly in elven Lothlórien. It also has a remote parallel in the Irish *sídh*.) In a song from the late Middle Ages about Olaf Liljekrans, the elven queen invites him to dance. He refuses, he knows what will happen if he joins the dance and he is on his way home to his own wedding. The queen offers him gifts, but he declines. She threatens to kill him if he does not join, but he rides off and dies of the disease she sent upon him, and his young bride dies of a broken heart.<sup>[14]</sup>

However, the elves were not exclusively young and beautiful. In the Swedish folktale *Little Rosa and Long Leda*, an elvish woman (*älvakvinna*) arrives in the end and saves the heroine, Little Rose, on condition that the king's cattle no longer graze on her hill. She is described as an old woman and by her aspect people saw that she belonged to the *subterraneans*.<sup>[15]</sup>

## German elves

What remained of the belief in elves in German folklore was that they were mischievous pranksters that could cause disease to cattle and people, and bring bad dreams to sleepers. The German word for nightmare, *Albtraum*, means "elf dream". The archaic form *Albdruck* means "elf pressure"; it was believed that nightmares are a result of an elf sitting on the dreamer's head. This aspect of German elf-belief largely corresponds to the Scandinavian belief in the *mara*. It is also similar to the legends regarding incubi and succubi.<sup>[16]</sup>

As noted above, an elven king occasionally appears among the predominantly female elves in Denmark and Sweden. In the German middle-age epic the *Nibelungenlied*, a dwarf named Alberich play an important role. Alberich literally translates as "elf-sovereign", further contributing to the elf-dwarf confusion observed already in the Younger Edda. Via the French Alberon, the same name has entered English as Oberon – king of elves and fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see below).

The legend of *Der Erlkönig* appears to have originated in fairly recent times in Denmark and Goethe based his poem on "*Erlkönigs Tochter*" ("*Erlkönig's Daughter*"), a Danish work translated into German by Johann Gottfried Herder.

The *Erlkönig's* nature has been the subject of some debate. The name translates literally from the German as "Alder King" rather than its common English translation, "Elf King" (which would be rendered as *Elfenkönig* in German). It has often been suggested that *Erlkönig* is a mistranslation from the original Danish *elverkonge* or *elverkonge*, which *does* mean "elf king".

According to German and Danish folklore, the *Erlkönig* appears as an omen of death, much like the banshee in Irish mythology. Unlike the banshee, however, the *Erlkönig* will appear only to the person about to die. His form and expression also tell the person what sort of death they will have: a pained expression means a painful death, a peaceful expression means a peaceful death. This aspect of the legend was immortalised by Goethe in his poem *Der Erlkönig*, later set to music by Schubert.

In the Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Der Schuhmacher und die Heinzelmännchen*, a group of naked, one foot tall beings called *Heinzelmännchen* help a shoemaker in his work. When he rewards their work with little clothes, they are so delighted, that they run away and are never seen again. Even though *Heinzelmännchen* are akin to beings such as kobolds and dwarves, the tale has been translated to English as *The Shoemaker & the Elves*, (probably due to the similarity of the *henzelmännchen* to Scottish brownies) and is echoed in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories (see *House-elf*).



## English elves



*Poor little birdie teased*, by Victorian era illustrator Richard Doyle depicts the traditional view of an elf from later English folklore as a diminutive woodland humanoid.

The word *elf* came into English as the Old English word *ælf* (pl. *ælfes*, with regional and chronological variants such as *ylfe* and *ælfen*), and so came to Britain originally with the Anglo-Saxons.[17] Words for the nymphs of the Greek and Roman mythos were translated by Anglo-Saxon scholars with *ælf* and variants on it.<sup>[18]</sup>

Although our early English evidence is slight, there are reasons to think that Anglo-Saxon elves (*ælfes*) were similar to early elves in Norse mythology: human-like, human-sized supernatural beings, predominantly if not exclusively male, capable of helping or harming the people who encountered them. In particular, the pairing of *æsir* and *álfar* found in the Poetic Edda is mirrored in the Old English charm *Wið færstice* and in the distinctive occurrence of the cognate words *os* and *ælf* in Anglo-Saxon personal names (e.g. Oswald, *Ælfric*<sup>[19]</sup>).

In relation to the beauty of the Norse elves, some further evidence is given by old English words such as *ælfsciene* ("elf-beautiful"), used of seductively beautiful Biblical women in the Old English poems *Judith* and *Genesis A*.<sup>[20]</sup> Although elves could be considered to be beautiful and potentially helpful beings in some sections of English-speaking society throughout its history, Anglo-Saxon evidence also attests to alignments of elves with demons, as for example in line 112 of *Beowulf*. On the other hand, *oaf* is simply a variant of the word *elf*, presumably originally referring to a changeling or to someone stupefied by elvish enchantment.

*Elf-shot* (or *elf-bolt* or *elf-arrow*) is a word found in Scotland and Northern England, first attested in a manuscript of about the last quarter of the 16th century. Although first attested in the sense 'sharp pain caused by elves', it is later attested denoting Neolithic flint arrowheads, which by the 17th century seem to have been attributed in Scotland to elvish folk, and which were used in healing rituals, and alleged to be used by witches (and perhaps elves) to injure people and cattle.<sup>[21]</sup> So too a tangle in the hair was called an *elf-lock*, as being caused by the mischief of the elves, and sudden paralysis was sometimes attributed to *elf-stroke*. Compare with the following excerpt from an 1750 ode by Willam Collins:

*There every herd, by sad experience, knows  
How, winged with fate, their elf-shot arrows fly,  
When the sick ewe her summer food forgoes,  
Or, stretched on earth, the heart-smit heifers lie.*<sup>[22]</sup>

The elf makes many appearances in ballads of English and Scottish origin, as well as folk tales, many involving trips to Elphame or Elfland (the Álfheim of Norse mythology), a mystical realm which is sometimes an eerie and unpleasant place. The elf is occasionally portrayed in a positive light, such as the Queen of Elphame in the ballad *Thomas the Rhymer*, but many examples exist of elves of sinister character, frequently bent on rape and murder, as in the *Tale of Childe Rowland*, or the ballad *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight*, in which the Elf-Knight bears away Isabel to murder her. Most instances of elves in ballads are male; the only commonly encountered female elf is the Queen of Elfland, who appears in *Thomas the Rhymer* and *The Queen of Elfland's Nourice*, in which a woman is abducted to be a wet-nurse to the queen's baby, but promised that she may return home once the child is weaned. In none of these cases is the elf a spritely character with pixie-like qualities.

English folktales of the early modern period typically portray elves as small, elusive people with mischievous personalities. They are not evil but might annoy humans or interfere in their affairs. They are sometimes said to be invisible. In this tradition, elves became more or less synonymous with the fairies that originated from native British mythology, for example, the Welsh *Ellyll* (plural *Ellyllon*) and *Y Dynon Bach Têg*. Lompa Lompa the Gigantic Elf from Plemurian Forest.



*"To make my small elves coats; and some keep back."* One of Arthur Rackham's illustrations to William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>[23]</sup>

Successively, the word *elf*, as well as literary term *fairy*, evolved to a general denotation of various nature spirits like *pwcca*, *hobgoblin*, *Robin Goodfellow*, the Scots *brownie*, and so forth. These terms, like their relatives in other European languages, are no longer clearly distinguished in popular folklore.

Significant for the distancing of the concept of elves from its mythological origins was the influence from literature. In Elizabethan England, William Shakespeare imagined elves as



little people. He apparently considered elves and fairies to be the same race. In *Henry IV*, part 1, act II, scene iv, he has Falstaff call Prince Henry, "you starveling, you elfskin!", and in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, his elves are almost as small as insects. On the other hand, Edmund Spenser applies elf to full-sized beings in *The Faerie Queene*.

The influence of Shakespeare and Michael Drayton made the use of elf and fairy for very small beings the norm. In Victorian literature, elves usually appeared in illustrations as tiny men and women with pointed ears and stocking caps. An example is Andrew Lang's fairy tale *Princess Nobody* (1884), illustrated by Richard Doyle, where fairies are tiny people with butterfly wings, whereas elves are tiny people with red stocking caps. There were exceptions to this rule however, such as the full-sized elves who appear in Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*.

There is a legend concerning the Buckthorn vows that if one sprinkles Buckthorn in a circle and then dances within it under a full Moon, an elf will appear. The dancer must notice the elf and say, 'Halt and grant my boon!' before the creature flees. The elf will then grant one wish.

## Modern elves

### Elves at Christmas

In the USA, Canada, and England, the modern children's folklore of [Santa Claus](#) typically includes diminutive, green-clad elves with pointy ears and long noses as Santa's assistants. They wrap [Christmas](#) gifts and make toys in a workshop located in the North Pole. In this portrayal, elves slightly resemble nimble and delicate versions of the dwarves of Norse mythology.

The vision of the small but crafty Christmas elf has come to influence modern popular conception of elves, and sits side by side with the fantasy elves following Tolkien's work (see below). The American cookie company Keebler has long advertised that its cookies are made by elves in a hollow tree, and Kellogg's, who happens to now be the owner of Keebler, uses the elves of Snap, Crackle, and Pop as mascots of Rice Krispies cereal, and the role of elves as Santa's helpers has continued to be popular, as evidenced by the success of the movie *Elf*. It should be noted that these elves are referred to as elfish, as apposed to elven.

### Elves in modern fantasy

Modern fantasy literature has revived the elves as a race of semi-divine beings of human stature. Fantasy elves are different from Norse elves, but are more akin to that older mythology than to folktale elves – they are unlikely to sneak in at night and help a cobbler mend his shoes. The grim Norse-style elves of human size introduced Poul Anderson's fantasy novel *The Broken Sword* from 1954 are one of the first precursors to modern fantasy elves, although they are overshadowed (and preceded) by the Elves of the twentieth-century philologist and fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien had little use for Shakespearean fairy portrayals or for Victorian diminutive fairy prettiness and whimsy, aligning his elves with the god-like and human-sized *ljósálfar* of Norse mythology. His Elves were conceived as a

race of beings similar in appearance to humans but fairer and wiser, with greater spiritual powers, keener senses, and a closer empathy with nature. They are great smiths and fierce warriors on the side of good. Tolkien's Elves of Middle-earth are immortal in the sense that they are not vulnerable to disease or the effects of old age. Although they can be killed in battle like humans and may alternately wither away from grief, their spirits only pass to the blessed land in the west called Valinor, whereas humans' souls leave the world entirely.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) became astoundingly popular and was much imitated. In the 1960s and afterwards, elves similar to those in Tolkien's novels became staple non-human characters in high fantasy works and in fantasy role-playing games. Tolkien's Elves were enemies of goblins (orcs) and had a longstanding quarrel with the Dwarves; these motifs often reappear in Tolkien-inspired works. Tolkien is also responsible for reviving the older and less-used terms elven and elvish rather than Edmund Spenser's invented elfin and elfish. He probably preferred the word elf over fairy because elf is of Anglo-Saxon origin while fairy entered English from French.

Post-Tolkien fantasy elves (popularized by the *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing game) tend to be more beautiful and wiser than humans, with sharper senses and perceptions. Most elves do not possess facial or body hair, and are consequently perceived to be androgynous. A hallmark of fantasy elves is also their long and pointed ears (a convention begun with a note of Tolkien's that the ears of elves were "leaf-shaped"). The length and shape of these ears varies depending on the artist or medium in question. For example, while most elves in Western fantasy have ears only slightly longer than humans', in various other areas of fantasy they are also depicted to have very long ears that stand out at dramatic angles from their heads. Half-elves and divergent races of elves, such as high elves and dark elves, were also popularized at this time; in particular, the evil drow of *Dungeons & Dragons* have inspired the dark elves of many other works of fantasy.

Fair elves of the Tolkien mold have become standardized staple characters of modern fantasy to such an extent that diverging from the established conceptions of how an elf is supposed to look and behave has become an end in itself for certain works of fantasy which aspire to innovation. For examples of the various ways modern fantasy writers have achieved this, see the main article. It is worth noting that those things described as being of or related to these fair elves are referred to as "elven", as opposed to "elfish" (a term more closely associated with the sprite-like elves of medieval conception).

Elves are also featured in their own genre of erotic fantasy.

## **Elves in psychedelic experience**

Machine elves, a term first introduced by writer and psychedelic researcher Terrence McKenna, is used to describe the presumed other-worldly intelligent beings which subjects sometimes feel they encounter during psychedelic experiences (especially those induced by naturally-occurring tryptamines, such as DMT or psilocybin), as well as during shamanic and alien abduction experiences.

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## See also

- [Tomte](#)

- [Yule Lads](#)

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## Father Christmas

**Father Christmas** is a name used in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and several other Commonwealth Countries, as well as Ireland, for the gift-bringing figure of [Christmas](#) or yuletide. The name is also used in translation in many other countries; see [Santa Claus](#).

Although Father Christmas and Santa Claus (the latter deriving from the Dutch for [Saint Nicholas](#): *Sinterklaas*), are now used interchangeably, and both are to some extent identified with Saint Nicholas, the origins of Father Christmas are quite different from Santa Claus. Traditional differences also include their dress: Father Christmas wears a fur-lined hood, whereas Santa wears a red cap.



*Behold the majesty and grace  
of loueing, cheerefull, Christmas face:  
Whome many thousands with one breath  
Cry out let him be put to death.  
Who murtherers can neuer die:  
So long as man hath memory.*

Excerpt from Josiah King's *The Examination and Tryal of Father Christmas* (1686), published shortly after [Christmas](#) was reinstated as a holy day in England

Dating back to Norse mythology, Father Christmas has his roots in Paganism. Before Christianity came to British shores, it was customary for an elder man from the community to dress in furs and visit each dwelling. At each house, in the guise of "Old Winter" he would be plied with food and drink before moving on to the next. It was thought he carried the spirit of the winter with him, and that the winter would be kind to anyone hospitable to Old Winter. The custom was still kept in Medieval England, and after a decline during the

Commonwealth, became widespread again during the Restoration period. Father Christmas was also a significant character in Christmas mummers' plays.

A book dating from the time of the Commonwealth, *The Vindication of CHRISTMAS or, His Twelve Yeares' Observations upon the Times* involved Father Christmas advocating a merry, alcoholic Christmas and casting aspersions on the charitable motives of the ruling Puritans

He was neither a gift bringer, nor was he associated with children. During the Victorian era, when Santa Claus arrived from America he was merged with "Old Winter", "Old Christmas" or "Old Father Christmas" to create Father Christmas, the British Santa which survives today.

The Ghost of Christmas Present in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is based on Father Christmas.

Father Christmas is the only character who appears with the same name in fiction by both of those two famous Friends, C.S. Lewis (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), and J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Father Christmas Letters*)'

## References

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## See also

- [Christmas](#)
- [Joulupukki](#)
- [Saint Nicholas](#)
- [Santa Claus](#)
- [Christmas worldwide](#)

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## Joulupukki

**Joulupukki** is the Finnish name for [Santa Claus](#). The name Joulupukki literally means [Yule Goat](#) or *Christmas Goat*. This name is likely to come from an old Finnish tradition, where people dressed in goat hides, the apparition being called a *nuuttipukki*, used to go around from house to house after Christmas eating leftover food.

Today Joulupukki looks and behaves mostly like his American version, but there are differences. Joulupukki's workshop is situated, not in the North Pole or Greenland, but in Korvatunturi, Lapland, Finland (In the UK Father Christmas is said to be located in Lapland, however usually said to be the Norwegian part, it should be noted). Instead of sneaking in through the chimney during the night, he (traditionally played by Father or Grandad or Uncle, today by a Rent-a-Santa) knocks on the front door during the Christmas eve celebration. When he comes in, his first words are traditionally "*Onko täällä kilttejä lapsia?*" (Are there (any) nice children here?)

He usually wears warm red clothes, uses a walking stick, and travels in a sleigh driven by a number of reindeer. The popular song "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" in its Finnish translation, Petteri Punakuono, has led to Rudolph's general acceptance in the mythology as Joulupukki's lead reindeer. Santa's reindeer do not fly in the Finnish version, however. Joulupukki has a wife, Joulumuori ("*Old Lady Christmas*"), but tradition has not got much to say of her.

## Trivia

The location of Joulupukki's workshop comes from a children's radio show called Markus-sedän lastentunti ("Children's hour with Uncle Markus") hosted by Markus Rautio and sent by The Finland's National Broadcasting Corporation between years 1927-1956.

## Joulupukki's Dark Side?

Pagan people used to have festivities to ward off evil spirits. In Finland these spirits of darkness wore goat skins and horns. In the beginning this creature didn't give presents but demanded them. The Christmas Goat was an ugly creature and frightened children.

It is unclear how this personality was transformed into the benevolent Father Christmas. Nowadays the only remaining feature is the name. The process was probably a continuous amalgamation of many old folk customs and beliefs from varied sources. One can speak of a Christmas pageant tradition consisting of many personages with roles partly Christian, partly pagan: A white-bearded saint, the Devil, demons, house gnomes, whatnot. Nowadays the Joulupukki of Finland resembles the American Santa Claus.

Popular radio programs from the year 1927 onwards probably had great influence in reformatting the concept with the Santa-like costume, reindeer and Korvatunturi (Mount Ear, near Polar Circle) as its dwelling place. Because there really are reindeer in Finland, and Finns are living up North, the popular American cult took root in Finland very fast. Maybe some caring soul decided the Joulupukki is just too scary for little kids.

Today, Finland is one of the few countries where kids actually see Father Christmas in the act of delivering the presents.

## See also

- [Yule Goat](#)
- Finland: Joulupukki at Christmas around the world

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## Julemanden

**Julemanden** can be directly translated to "Christmas Man". In modern Danish culture Julemanden is the equivalent of the English [Santa Claus](#) although the roots of the character

reaches into Danish folklore and mythology wherein julemanden is a mythical character who is said to bring [Christmas](#) presents to children in Denmark on christmas eve, celebrated December 24th.

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## Kris Kringle

**Kris Kringle** is a [Christmas](#) gift-bringer in Germany. The name is derived from the earlier Christkindl introduced by Martin Luther. Both are distinct in origin and tradition from [Santa Claus](#) and [Father Christmas](#). While Kris Kringle was popular up to the mid twentieth century, now only Roman Catholics in Nuremberg use this figure, now represented as a female angel.

### Related uses

- *Kris Kringle* was the "real name" of the title character in the film Miracle on 34th Street, a man who claims to be Santa Claus
- *Kris Kringle* is a name used in Australia and Britain for what Americans call [Secret Santa](#)

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## La Befana

**La Befana** is a friendly character in Italian folklore, similar to [Santa Claus](#). The character originated possibly from Rome, then the tradition spreaded to peninsular Italy. Her name derives from the festival of [Epiphany](#), and she visits all the children of Italy on the night of 5 January / 6 January to fill their socks with candy if they are good or a lump of coal if they are bad. Being a good housekeeper, many say she will sweep the floor before she leaves. The child's family typically leaves a small glass of wine and a plate with a few morsels of food, often regional or local, for Befana.

She is usually portrayed as an old lady, riding a broomstick through the air. Unlike a witch though, she is often smiling and she has a bag or a hamper filled with candy and/or gifts.

Legend has it that La Befana was approached by the three Magi some days before Christ's birth. She provided them with shelter for a night, as she was considered the best housekeeper in the village with the most pleasant home. They invited her to join them on the journey to find the Christ Child, but she declined, stating she was too busy with her housework. Later, Befana had a change of heart, and tried to search out for the Magi and the Christ child. That night she was not able to find them, so to this day, La Befana is searching for the Christ child. She leaves all the good children toys and candy, while the bad children get coal; for she never knows who might be Jesus!



Traditionally, all Italian children may expect to find a lump of "coal" in their stockings (actually rock candy made black with caramel coloring), as every child has been at least occasionally bad during the preceding year.

In the center of Rome, in Piazza Navona, a popular Market, the *Fiera della Befana* takes place each year between Christmas and the Epiphany. There toys, sugar charcoal and candies are sold for the roman children.

The feast of la Befana in Rome has been immortalized in four famous sonetti in roman dialect by the nineteenth century roman poet Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli.

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## Mos Gerila

**Mo\_ Geril** was, in Communist Romania, a replacement of [Father Christmas](#) (*Mo\_ Crciun*), being part of the Communist offensive against religion. Its name is a Romanian language adaptation of Russian [Ded Moroz](#) ("Father Frost").

In 1948, after the Communists gained power in Romania, it was decided that [Christmas](#) should not be celebrated in Romania, 25 December and 26 December being working days and no official celebrations were to be held. As a replacement of *Mo\_ Crciun*, a new character was introduced, *Mo\_ Geril* (literally "Old Man Frosty"), who brought gifts to children on 31 December.

Officially, the New Year's Day celebrations began on 30 December, which was named the Day of the Republic, since it was the day when King Mihai I of Romania abdicated in 1947.

After the Romanian Revolution of 1989, *Mo\_ Geril* lost his influence, being replaced with *Mo\_ Crciun*.

## References

- [Amintiri cu Mo\\_ Geril](#), *Evenimentul Zilei*, 24 December 2005

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## Mr. Bingle

**Mr. Bingle** is a fictional character, a snowman assistant to [Santa Claus](#). Originating as a mascot of the Maison Blanche department store in New Orleans, Louisiana, the character was later marketed by Dillard's and remains part of the pop-culture of the Greater New Orleans area.

## History



Mr. Bingle was created and designed by Emile Alline, an employee of Maison Blanche, in 1947. Mister Bingle shared the initials of his home, "M.B.", as the store was often called. Mr. Bingle first appeared in puppet form at the Canal Street Maison Blanche in 1950s, puppeteered by Oscar Isentrout (who also played the voice of Mr. Bingle). These puppet shows occurred each day for the few weeks leading up to [Christmas](#) for about 15 minutes at a time, and were a favorite of local children. Mr. Bingle also appeared in musical radio and television commercials. The puppet shows ended in 1985 when Isentrout died.

For years Mr. Bingle related merchandise, especially plush toys, were sold.



Mr. Bingle plush doll

Mr. Bingle's theme song:

*Jingle, jangle, jingle/Here comes Mr. Bingle/With another message from Kris Kringle/Time to launch your Christmas season/Maison Blanche makes Christmas pleasin'/Gifts galore for you to see/Each a gem from MB!*

Later Dillard's bought the Maison Blanche chain and the Mr. Bingle trademark. Today, many locals consider Mr. Bingle a cultural icon, fondly remembering the times when Mr. Bingle's shows were one of the most anticipated activities of the [Christmas](#) season.

Mr. Bingle was also displayed as a large paper mache figure on the front of the flagship Maison Blanche store on Canal Street, first standing next to [Santa Claus](#) and later in a flying form. The flying figure was displayed at the Metairie, Louisiana Maison Blanche Store and later at a Dillard's Metairie location when the Canal Street store was closed. Dillard's donated the large display (in disrepair) to New Orleans City Park and it was refurbished and made its return for the 2005 [Christmas](#) season at their "Celebration in the Oaks" light display.

## Mr. Bingle in Tennessee

Mr. Bingle also appeared in Memphis at the department store Lowenstein's and was used in Christmas advertising for a period nationwide at various regional department stores owned by Mercantile Stores (which acquired MB a few years before itself being acquired by Dillard's).

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## Mrs. Claus

**Mrs. Claus** is a folk hero, and is the wife of [Santa Claus](#) in many modern versions of the [Santa Claus](#) legend.

In many current versions of the mythos, Mrs. Claus lives with her husband and assists with the production of Santa's toys, sometimes overseeing their production by Santa's elves. Mrs. Claus is also shown as enjoying baking. She is usually depicted as being fairly heavy-set like her husband, with white hair in a bun-style hairdo, and (in some depictions) eyeglasses.

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### Origin of Mrs. Claus

Mrs. Claus was created in poetry by Katherine Lee Bates, author of *America the Beautiful*, in *Goody Santa Claus on a Sleigh Ride* in her book: *Sunshine and other Verses for Children*, published in 1889. *Goody* is a shortened form of the archaic word *Goodwife* meaning the female head of the house or simply wife.

The character of Mrs. Claus is a fairly recent creation. The 1956 George Melachrino song *Mrs. Santa Claus* helped standardize the character and role in the popular imagination.

### Depictions in popular media

Today Mrs. Claus is commonly seen in cartoons, storybooks, and movies that deal with Christmas and the world of Santa Claus. Her personality tends to be fairly consistent; she is usually seen as a calm, kind, and patient woman, often in contrast to Santa himself, who can be prone to acting too exuberant.

## Movies

The early 2000s movie *The Santa Clause 2* centers on Tim Allen's character being forced to marry in order to continue his role as Santa.

Mrs. Claus is also a character in 1985's *Santa Claus: The Movie*, where she played a vital role to the film's story.

## Television

Mrs. Claus played a major role in several of Rankin/Bass' [Christmas](#) specials. In *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*, she is introduced as a teacher named Jessica, who first meets Santa Claus as a young man, when he's trying to illegally deliver toys to a town run by a despotic ruler. Assisting Santa, Jessica and Santa soon fall in love with each other, and soon marry each other in the nearby forest. In 1975's *The Year Without a Santa Claus*, Mrs. Claus played a large role, as she attempts to show Santa (who wishes to stay home that year for Christmas when he feels no one believes in him anymore) that there's some Christmas spirit left in the world. Mrs. Claus also made appearances in several other Rankin/Bass specials, including *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *Rudolph and Frosty's Christmas In July*.

One of Mrs. Claus' most unusual television appearances is in *The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy* Christmas special *Billy and Mandy Save Christmas*, in which she is the leader of all vampires.

## See also

- [Santa Claus](#)

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# Saint Nicholas

**Bishop of Myra, Defender of Orthodoxy, Miracle Worker, Holy Hierarch**

**Born:** 3rd century in Patara

**Died:** 6 December 343 in Myra

**Venerated in:** All Christianity

**Major shrine:** St. Nicholas' relics are held in a crypt in Bari, Italy, but his great work was done in Myra.

**Feast:** December 6

**Attributes:** St Nicholas is usually portrayed as a Bishop, in whatever manner is appropriate for a Bishop in that particular Church's practices.

**Patronage:** In the West, St. Nicholas is a patron of sailors and thieves, because his relics were stolen by sailors from his tomb and transported to Bari, Italy. In the East, he is more remembered for his defense against the Arian heresy.

**Saint Nicholas** (Greek: <sup>1</sup>ᾠ»±¿Â, "Victory of the people") is the common name for Saint Nicholas of Myra, who had a reputation for secret gift-giving, but is now commonly known as [Santa Claus](#). He lived in 4th century Myra in the Byzantine Empire's Lycia, the modern day Demre in the Antalya province of Turkey. This is as much as is generally known about him in the West.

This historical character was the inspiration for a mythical figure known as *Nikolaus* in Germany and *Sinterklaas* in the Netherlands and Flanders, which in turn was the inspiration for Santa Claus. Sinterklaas (a contracted form of *Sint Nicolaas*) is a major celebration in the Netherlands and in Flanders (see [below](#)). Among Orthodox Christians, the historical Saint Nicholas is remembered and revered. Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors, merchants, archers, children, and students in both Greece and Russia. He is also the patron saint of Barranquilla, Colombia and of Amsterdam.

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## Nicholas the clergyman

**Nicholas of Myra** (also *Nikolaus*) in Lycia, Asia Minor (lived c. 270 - 345/352), was a 4th century bishop and is a Christian saint. His feast day is December 6, presumably the date of his death. In the Netherlands 5 December is known as his feast: this is Sinterklaasavond, or St. Nicholas' Eve. Among Christians, he is also known as the "Miracle Worker". Several acts of kindness and miracles are attributed to him. Historical accounts often confuse him with the later Nicholas of Sion.

Nicholas was born in Asia Minor during the 3rd century at Patara in the province of Lycia, at a time when the region was Hellenistic in its culture and outlook. Nicholas became bishop of the city of Myra. He was very religious from an early age and devoted his life entirely to Christianity. He is said to have been born to relatively affluent Christian parents in Patara, Lycia, Asia Minor, Roman Empire where he also received his early schooling. According to some sources, his parents died while he was still a child, leaving a paternal uncle to care for him. Other sources place the death of his parents at the time he was already a young adult, leading him to a period of soul-searching which finally resulted in his uncle introducing him to Christianity. Whatever the reason, as a young adult and scholar, Nicholas moved to Myra to continue his studies and there the above-mentioned uncle introduced him to the local bishop. The latter is said to have seen potential in the youth and took Nicholas under his patronage. Nicholas received his ordination as a priest at an early age.

As the patron saint of sailors, Nicholas is claimed to have been a sailor or fisherman himself. More likely, however, is that one of his family businesses involved managing a fishing fleet. When his parents died, Nicholas still received his inheritance but is said to have given it away to charity. So was Saint Nicholas a working, albeit wealthy, man who complemented his day job with caring for his congregation, or was he a full-time bishop? The impressive list of deeds of Nicholas seems to point to the latter. This does not say, however, that his appointment to priest or bishop meant a complete rupture with his former life. More likely this was a gradual process.

Nicholas' early activities as a priest are said to have occurred during the reign of co-ruling Roman Emperors Diocletian (reigned 284 - 305) and Maximian (reigned 286 - 305) from which comes the estimation of his age. Diocletian issued an edict in 303 authorising the systematic persecution of Christians across the Empire. Following the abdication of the two Emperors on May 1, 305 the policies of their successors towards Christians were different. In the Western part of the Empire Constantius Chlorus (reigned 305 - 306) put an end to the systematic persecution upon his accession to the throne. In the Eastern part Galerius (reigned 305 - 311) continued the persecution until 311 when he issued a general edict of toleration from his deathbed. The persecution of 303 - 311 is considered to be the longest in the history of the Empire. Nicholas survived this period although his activities at the time are uncertain.

Following Galerius' death his surviving co-ruler Licinius (reigned 307 - 324) mostly tolerated Christians. As a result their community was allowed to further develop, and the various bishops who acted as their leaders managed to concentrate religious, social and political influence as well as wealth in their hands. In many cases they acted as the heads of their respective cities. It is apparently in this period that Nicholas rose to become bishop of Myra. Judging from tradition, he was probably well loved and respected in his area, mostly as a result of his charitable activities. As with other bishops of the time, Nicholas' popularity would serve to ensure his position and influence during and after this period.

The destruction of several pagan temples is also attributed to him, among them one temple of Artemis (also known as Diana). Because the celebration of Diana's birth is on December 6, some authors have speculated that this date was deliberately chosen for Nicholas' feast day to overshadow or replace the pagan celebrations.

Nicholas is also known for coming to the defence of the falsely accused, often preventing them from being executed, and for his prayers on behalf of sailors and other travelers. The popular veneration of Nicholas as a saint seems to have started relatively early. Justinian I, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (reigned 527 - 565) is reported to have built a temple (i.e. a church building) in Nicholas's honour in Constantinople, the Roman capital of the time.

### **Bishop Nicholas at the First Ecumenical Council**

In 324 Licinius was defeated in a war against his Western co-ruler Constantine I of the Roman Empire (reigned 306 - 337). The end of the war found the Roman Empire unified under the rule of Constantine. Instead of tolerance, his policies towards Christians consisted of active support. Under his patronage the Christian church experienced an age of prosperity. But the relative peace of his reign brought to the forefront the internal conflict within contemporary Christianity. One of the apparent main reasons of this conflict was the failure to agree to a commonly accepted concept about God in general and Jesus in particular. At this time the teachings of Arius in Alexandria, Egypt were gaining popular support but also attracting great opposition. They would form the basis of Arianism. Emerging fanaticism in both opposing factions only resulted in spreading tumult across the Empire.

Deciding to address the problem as a matter of the state, Constantine called the First Council of Nicaea which also was the first Ecumenical council in 325. The number of attendees at the Council is uncertain with Eusebius of Caesarea reporting as few as 250 and Athanasius of Alexandria as many as 318. In any case Nicholas is usually counted among them and was noted as an opponent of Arianism.

A later writer claimed that after Arius had presented his case against Jesus' divinity to the Council, Nicholas hit Arius in the face out of indignation. Nicholas was kicked out of the Council for this offence, and jailed as well. However, according to this account, that night the Virgin Mary appeared in a vision to many of the bishops of the Council, telling them to forgive Nicholas, for he had done it out of love for her Son. They released Nicholas and allowed him back into the process the next day.

The council lasted from May 20 to June 19, 325 and resulted in the declaration of the Nicene Creed and the formal condemnation of Arianism. The books of Arius and his followers were condemned to be burned but the execution of this decision was left at the hands of each

bishop for their respective territories. To what point this decision was followed remains uncertain.

Following this apparent victory to his faction Nicholas returned to Myra. He is applauded by later Christian writers for keeping Myra free of Arianism. But the decisions of the council failed to stop the spread of Arianism. In fact the tides soon turned and in his later years Arianism managed to win favour with Constantine. In fact Constantine was baptised by Eusebius of Nicomedia, an Arian bishop who had also attended the council, shortly before his death on May 22, 337. Constantine was succeeded by his three surviving sons: Constantine II of the Roman Empire (reigned 337 - 340), Constantius II (reigned 337 - 361) and Constans (reigned 337 - 350). Constantius originally received the Eastern part of the Empire but the death of his brothers left the entire Empire under his control. During his reign he strongly favoured Arianism by seeking to place Arian bishops in most positions. There is no indication that Nicholas was affected by these policies and he remained in his position till his death. This lack of disturbance by the Arian Emperor has been seen as indicating the strong support Nicholas had gained among the people of his territory. According to this reasoning not even Constantius would risk a possible revolt by removing a popular bishop.

### **Abduction of his relics**

On August 26, 1071 Romanus IV, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (reigned 1068 - 1071) faced Sultan Alp Arslan of the Seljuk Turks (reigned 1059 - 1072) in the Battle of Manzikert. The battle ended in humiliating defeat and capture for Romanus. As a result the Empire temporarily lost control over most of Asia Minor to the invading Seljuk Turks. It would regain its control over Asia Minor during the reign of Alexius I Comnenus, (reigned 1081 - 1118). But early in his reign Myra was overtaken by the Islamic invaders. Taking advantage of the confusion, sailors from Bari, Italy seized the remains of the saint over the objections of the Orthodox monks. Returning to Bari, they brought the remains with them and cared for them. The remains arrived on May 9, 1087. Some observers have reported seeing myrrh exude from these relics. According to a local legend, some of these remains were brought via three pilgrims to a church in what is now Nikolausberg in the vicinity of the city of Göttingen, Germany, giving the church and village its name.

### **The face of the historical saint**

Whereas the importance of relics and the business associated with pilgrims and patron saints caused the remains of most saints to be spread over several churches in several countries, Saint Nicholas is unique in that most of his bones have been preserved in one spot: his grave crypt in Bari. Although jealously guarded and kept from prying eyes of scientists, especially with the still continuing miracle of the manna, the Roman Catholic Church allowed for one scientific survey of the bones: In the late 1950s, during a restoration of the chapel, it allowed a team of their own scientists to photograph and measure the contents of the crypt grave.

In the summer of 2005, the report of this measurements was sent to a forensic laboratory in England. The review of the data revealed that the historical Saint Nicholas was barely five foot in height (while not exactly small, still shorter than average, even for his time) and had

a broken nose. This last may seem strange for a man of "saintly behavior", but would fit perfectly with Nicholas' sometimes violent nature as reported at the First Ecumenical Council

### **Deeds and miracles attributed to Saint Nicholas**

Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors and is often called upon by sailors who are in danger of drowning or being shipwrecked. According to one legend, as a young man Nicholas went to study in Alexandria and on one of his (sea) voyages from Myra to Alexandria he is said to have saved the life of a sailor who fell from the ship's rigging in a storm. In a colourful version of this legend, Nicholas saved the man on his voyage back from Alexandria to Myra and upon his arrival took the sailor to the church. At that time the old bishop had just died and the church fathers were instructed in a dream to choose for their next bishop a "man of victory" (Greek: Nikei). While the saint was praying, the loose-lipped sailor went around telling how courageously he was saved by the man Nikei-Laos, upon which the church elders had no choice but to appoint Nicholas as their new bishop.

Another legend tells how a terrible famine struck the island and a malicious butcher lured three little children into his house, only to kill and slaughter them and put their remains in a barrel to cure, planning to sell them off as ham. Saint Nicholas, visiting the region to care for the hungry, not only saw through the butcher's horrific crime but also managed to resurrect the three boys from the barrel. Another version of this story, possibly formed around the eleventh century, claims that they were instead three clerks who wished to stay the night. The man murdered them, and was advised by his wife to dispose of them by turning them into meat pies. The Saint saw through this and brought the men back to life. This alternate version is thought to be the origin of the English horror legend, Sweeney Todd.

In his most famous exploit however, a poor man had three daughters but could not afford a proper dowry for them. This meant that they would remain unmarried and probably, in absence of any other possible employment would have to become prostitutes. Hearing of the poor man's plight, Nicholas decided to help him but being too modest (or too shy) to help the man in public, he went to his house under the cover of night and threw three purses filled with gold coins through the window opening onto the man's floor. One version has him throwing one purse for three consecutive nights. Another has him throw the purses over a period of three years, each time the night before one of the daughters comes "of age". Invariably the third time the father lies in waiting, trying to discover their benefactor. In one version the father confronts the saint, only to have Saint Nicholas say it is not him he should thank God alone. In another version, Nicholas learns of the poor man's plan and drops the third bag down the chimney instead. For his help to the poor, Nicholas is the patron saint of pawnbrokers; the three gold balls traditionally hung outside a pawnshop symbolize the three sacks of gold. People then began to suspect that he was behind a large number of other anonymous gifts to the poor, using the inheritance from his wealthy parents. After he died, people in the region continued to give to the poor anonymously, and such gifts were still often attributed to St. Nicholas.

It should be noted perhaps that a nearly identical story is attributed by Greek folklore to Basil of Caesarea. Basil's feast day on January 1 is also considered a time of exchanging gifts.



It is said that in Myra the bones of Saint Nicholas each year sweated out a clear watery liquid, called Manna, which of course was said to possess immense powers. As the bones were stolen and brought to Bari, they continued to do so, much to the joy of the new owners. So even up to today, a flask of manna is extracted from the tomb of Saint Nicholas every year on December 6th (the Saint's birthday). It is however worth noting that the tomb lies at sea level in a harbor town so the occurrence of watery liquid can be explained by several theories. Still, neither the church nor any scientists have ever tried to analyse the fluid, so truth still lies in the eye of the believer.

One of the most amazing feats of Saint Nicholas however was that he lived to a ripe old age and died peacefully in his own bed. At a time where most saints earned their place in heaven by dying for their faith in manners most unusual and cruel, this definitely made him stand out (together with Saint Martin, who also died of natural old age) and definitely aided to his 'popularity' in every way of the word.

### **Formal veneration of the saint**

Among the Greeks and Italians he is a favourite of sailors, fishermen, ships and sailing. As such he has become over time the patron saint of several cities maintaining harbours. In centuries of Greek folklore, Nicholas was seen as "The Lord of the Sea", often described by modern Greek scholars as a kind of Christianised version of Poseidon. In modern Greece, he is still easily among the most recognisable saints and December 6 finds many cities celebrating their patron saint. He is also the patron saint of all of Greece.

In the Middle Ages, both Saint Nicholas and Martin of Tours were celebrated as true people's saints. Many churches were named for them and later gave their names to the villages that emerged around them. As described above, while most contemporary saints earned their place in heaven by dying for their faith in manners most unusual and cruel, both Nicholas and Martin lived peacefully to a ripe old age. At a time of Religious wars and Crusades the idea that one could go to heaven, even become a saint, just by the way one lived instead of the way one died must have offered a great deal of consolation for the Medieval common folk. Therefore this time made Saint Nicholas a 'popular' saint in every sense of the word, more than all his miracles combined.

In late medieval England, on St Nicholas' Day parishes held "boy-bishop" celebrations. As part of this celebration, youths performed the functions of priests and bishops, and exercised rule over their elders. Today, saint Nicholas is still celebrated as a great gift-giver in several Western European countries. According to one source, Medieval nuns used the night of December 6th to anonymously deposit baskets of food and clothes at the doorsteps of the needy. According to another source, On December 6th every sailor or ex-sailor of the Low Countries (which at that time was virtually all of the male population) would descend to the harbour towns to participate in a church celebration for their patron saint. On the way back they would stop at one of the various *Nicholas fairs* to buy some hard-to-come-by goods, gifts for their loved ones and invariably some little presents for their children. While the real gifts would only be presented at Christmas, the little presents for the children were given right away, courtesy of Saint Nicholas ... or Santa Claus... This, and also his miracle of him resurrecting the three butchered children, made Saint Nicholas a patron saint of children and later students as well.

Due to the modern association with Christmas, Saint Nicholas is a patron saint of Christmas, as well as pawnbrokers (see above). He was also a patron of the Varangian Guard of the Eastern Roman Emperors, who protected his relics in Bari.

### In iconography



St Nicholas, the patron saint of Russian merchants. Fresco by Dionisius from the Ferapontov Monastery.

The holy person of St. Nicholas is a popular subject portrayed on countless Eastern Orthodox icons, particularly Russian ones.

*"Icons are quite literally meant to be 'Windows Into Heaven' and to instil in the viewer an attitude of prayerful reflection on the Divine. In Russia icons were not only displayed in churches, but are given the place of honour in many homes, thus serving as a daily reminder to live in strict accordance with Christian virtue, values and duties."* (Source: [The InstaPLANET Cultural Universe](#)).

So beloved is St. Nicholas by Russians, one commonly heard saying is "if God dies, at least we'll still have St. Nicholas."

In Catholic iconography, Saint Nicholas is depicted as a bishop, wearing all the insignia of this profession: a red bishop's cloak, a red miter and a bishop's staff (crozier). Due to the episode with the three dowries, he is shown holding in his hand either three purses, three coins or three golden balls. Depending on whether he is depicted as patron saint of children or sailors, his images will be completed by a background showing ships, children or three figures climbing out of a wooden barrel (the three slaughtered children he resurrected).

In a strange twist, the three golden balls referring to the dowry affair are sometimes misinterpreted as being oranges or other fruits. As in the Low Countries oranges are generally believed to come from Spain, this led to the belief that the Saint lives in Spain and comes to visit every winter bringing oranges and other 'wintery' fruits.

### Saint Nicholas the festive gift-giver

*Saint Nicholas Day* is a festival for children in much of Europe related to surviving legends of the saint, and particularly his reputation as a bringer of gifts. The American [Santa Claus](#), Anglo-Canadian, and British [Father Christmas](#) derives from this festivity, the name 'Santa Claus' being a degeneration of the Dutch word *Sinterklaas*.

Some elements of this part of the Saint Nicholas tradition could be traced back to the Germanic god Wodan (Odin). The appearance is similar to some portrayals of this god. In the Saint Nicholas tradition in the Netherlands he rides a horse over the rooftops, and this may be derived from Odin's riding through the sky. Also his assistants, the *Zwarte Pieten* ('Black Peters') may be a remnant of the raven that accompanied Wodan.

The history of the festive Saint Nicholas celebration is complex and reflects conflicts between Protestantism and Catholicism. Since Nicholas was a canonised saint, Martin Luther replaced the festival that had become associated with the Papacy with a "Christkind" (Christ child) celebration on Christmas Eve. The Nicholas celebrations still remain a part of tradition among many Protestants, albeit on a much smaller scale than Christmas. The Protestant Netherlands, however, retain a much larger Saint Nicholas tradition. Many Catholics, on the other hand, have adopted Luther's Christkind.

### **Celebration in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and Luxembourg**

In Germany, *Nikolaus* is usually celebrated on a small scale. Many children put a boot, called *Nikolaus-Stiefel*, outside the front door on the night of December 5 to December 6. St. Nicholas fills the boot with gifts, and at the same time checks up on the children to see if they were good. If they were not, they will have charcoal in their boots instead. Sometimes a disguised Nikolaus also visits the children at school or in their homes and asks them if they "have been good" (sometimes ostensibly checking a book for their record), handing out presents on a per-behaviour basis. This has become more lenient in recent decades.

But for many children, Nikolaus also elicited fear, as he was often accompanied by *Knecht Ruprecht*, who would threaten to beat, or sometimes actually eat the children for misbehaviour. Knecht Rupert furthermore was equipped with goatlegs. In Switzerland, where he is called *Schmutzli*, he would threaten to put bad children in a sack and take them back to the Black Forest. In other accounts he would throw the sack into the river, drowning the naughty children within. These traditions were implemented more rigidly in Catholic countries such as Austria. In highly Catholic regions, the local priest was informed by the parents about their children's behaviour and would then personally visit the homes in the traditional Christian garment and threaten to beat them with a rod. In parts of Austria, *Krampusse*, who local tradition says are Nikolaus's helpers (in reality, typically children of poor families), roamed the streets during the festival. They wore masks and dragged chains behind them, even occasionally hurling them towards children in their way. These *Krampusläufe* (Krampus runs) still exist, although perhaps less violent than in the past. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, *Mikuláš* is often also accompanied by an angel who acts as a counterweight to the ominous Knecht Ruprecht (ert). In Slovenia Saint Nikolaus (*Miklavž*) is accompanied by an angel and a devil (*parkelj*) corresponding Austrian Krampus. In

Luxembourg "Kleeschen" is accompanied by the "Houseker" a frightening helper wearing a brown monk's habit.

### **Celebration in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, Saint Nicholas' eve is *the* occasion for gift-giving, when his alleged birthday is celebrated. In this case, roles are reversed, though, in that Sinterklaas is the one who gives the presents.

In recent years, Christmas (along with Santa Claus) has been pushed by shopkeepers as another gift-giving festival, with some success, although, especially for young children, Saint Nicholas' eve is still much more important than Christmas.

On the evening of December 5, *Sinterklaas* brings presents to every child that has been good in the past year (in practice to all children). *Sinterklaas* wears a red bishop's dress including a red mitre, rides a white horse (called Amerigo) over the rooftops and is assisted by many mischievous helpers with black faces and colourful Moorish dresses, dating back two centuries. These helpers are called 'Zwarte Pieten' (black Petes).

### **Celebration in Belgium**

Originally *Sinterklaas* or *Sint-Nikolaas* was only celebrated in Flanders and the Netherlands the way described above, but now he is celebrated in Wallonia in the same way. The celebrating of *Saint-Nicholas* is mostly the same as in the Netherlands, but in Belgium the children receive their presents on the 6th of December. Children have to put their shoes by the stove the evening of the 5th of December and the next morning, they find their presents. This tradition was still alive thirty years ago in the Catholic south of The Netherlands.

Note that Saint Nicholas has been celebrated in Belgium for centuries - there is even a city called Sint-Niklaas - but, like every folkloristic thing in Belgium, there might be small differences, and generally in the eastern part of the provinces West Flanders and East Flanders Saint Nicholas is not celebrated, but instead children receive presents from Sint Maarten (Saint Martin) on the 11th of November. Saint Nicholas is also celebrated by the university students in the city of Liège.

### **Celebration in France**

In France, *Saint Nicolas* is only celebrated this way in the eastern part of the country (Alsace, Lorraine regions) and less strongly in the northern part of the country (Nord département). He is accompanied by "Père Fouettard", carrying a bunch of sticks with which naughty children are beaten.

## Celebration in Portugal

In Portugal, St. Nicholas (*São Nicolau*) has been celebrated since the Middle Ages in Guimarães as the patron saint of high-school students, in the so called *Nicolinas*, a group of festivities that occur from November 29th to December 7th each year.

## Benjamin Britten cantata

Benjamin Britten wrote a Christmas cantata commissioned by three public schools. This tells the story of Saint Nicholas and his Christian exploits. This is for small orchestra, three choirs, a tenor soloist (St. Nicholas), and a treble (young Saint Nicholas).

## Metamorphosis in Demre

The metamorphosis of Saint Nicolas into the commercially more interesting Santa Claus, which took several ages in Europe and America, has recently been reenacted in the Saint's home town, the city of Demre. This modern Turkish city is built on the ruins of ancient Myra. As St. Nicholas is the most important Russian Orthodox saint, the city attracts many Russian tourists. A solemn bronze statue of the Saint by the Russian sculptor Gregory Pototsky, donated by the Russian government in 2000, had been given a prominent place on the square in front of the medieval church of St. Nicholas. In 2005, mayor Suleyman Topcu had the statue replaced by a red-suited plastic Santa Claus statue, because he wanted the central statue to be more familiar to visitors from all over the world. Protests from the Russian government against the disgrace were only successful to the extent that the Russian statue returned, without its original high pedestal, in a corner near the church.

## See also

- [Companions of Saint Nicholas](#)

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## Olentzero

**Olentzero** is a Basque [Christmas](#) tradition. According to Basque traditions Olentzero comes to town late at night on the 24th of December to drop off presents for children. There are many variations of this old tradition. Over the centuries the "story" of Olentzero has been modified over and over again to adapt it to the new times. Also, different villages have created their own interpretations of the tale. In some, Olentzero is just a [Christmas log](#) by the fireplace.

The first written account of Olentzero is from Lope de Isasi in the 16th century. Back then he was called "Onentzaro" ("Time of the good one"). The account states that, thousands of years ago, there was a tribe of giants, the jentillak; Olentzero was one of them. They lived in

the forests of the Pyrenees, in Navarra, in the area of the village Lesaka. One day the people of this tribe discovered a glowing cloud in the sky. They feared that this celestial phenomenon was the divine sign of the arrival of the imminent birth of Jesus. None of them could look at this bright cloud except for a very old, nearly blind man. They held him up to take a look. He turned pale and confirmed their wildest fear: "Yes, this is the sign, Jesus will be born soon". They feared that vast changes would come jointly with the arrival and the demise of their way of life. After foreseeing this terrible news, the old man only saw a solution in terminating his life. So he asked his friends to throw him off the highest cliff. They complied. But on the way back down the mountain, the group of giants tripped, all came to fall, and head over heels they fell to their death. All, except one. The only survivor Olentzero hiked to the villages in the valley and with his sickle brutally cut the throat of those people who ate too much on the day before the arrival of Christ, i.e. on the 24th of December. He himself was not the fasting type. He was a thick glutton who could eat a barrow-load of meat which he washed down with strong liquor. No surprise that he was frequently drunk and irritable.

In the last century this legend had to be adapted. Young children didn't like to hear about grumpy old men who slice open the throat of normal citizens and let them bleed to death. A more civilized version had to be created. More precisely the church wanted to stop pagan rites and turn people into good Christians. The church wanted to turn the pagan custom related to the winter solstice into a Christian feast with a Christian-like hero. Basque nationalism wanted an alternative to the Spanish tradition of the Magi and the French and North European [Père Noel](#) and [Santa Claus](#).

In the cleansed, Christianized variation Olentzero is a human, a humble man with a heart filled with love. As a new born he was left alone in the woods and a fairy with long blond hair found him, adopted him, gave him the name Olentzero and raised him. He turned into a strong man and worked as a charcoal burner. He was hard-working and gifted with his hands. He carved wooden animals, toys and dolls. When he had a big charcoal bag full of toys he hiked to the village in the valley and distributed the wooden figures amongst the children because he liked to see them happy. He played with them all afternoon. The kids loved him and Olentzero came back whenever he had finished another bag of toys. Whenever he came to the village the kids surrounded him. One day as he came down to the village he found a house in flames. He dashed towards the house finding crying children behind the closed windows. Without hesitation he ran into the house and freed them by lowering them from an upstairs window. With everyone safe he went downstairs when the house collapsed under the fire, burying him. The people from the village had gathered by now outside the burning ruins and they suddenly saw a white flash leaving the flames and heading towards the sky. The fairy that had found him in the woods had come to be with him in this moment. She said, "Olentzero you have such a good heart, you even gave your life for others. You should not die. You shall live forever, making toys for all the children in this village and in the whole Basque Country". This is how Olentzero comes to all Basque children on 24th of December bringing them gifts.

## Appearance

Olentzero is represented as a Basque peasant with a boina and smoking a pipe. Whether he has a beard or not is not yet an established tradition. On Christmas Eve, folk groups carry Olentzero dummies on a chair around the streets, singing carols.

The Olentzero tradition coexists with the Magi and [Father Christmas](#). Some families may choose one or two of them, though.

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## Pere Noel

**Père Noël** is the French equivalent of the British [Father Christmas](#) and the American [Santa Claus](#). In general, France has not adopted the modern garb of Santa Claus in jacket and trousers, but keeps to the older version with a long red hooded robe, edged with white fur. His presents are carried not in a sack, but in a basket or *hotte* on his back, like those carried by grape harvesters. He furthermore is believed to live in Lapland. Children do not put out a stocking, but their shoes. A popular [Christmas](#) song for children is [Petit Papa Noël](#).

The contemporary Quebec version of Père Noël is identical to the Santa Claus of North America and doesn't inherit its roots from the French tradition but from the English-Canada/US tradition. He lives at the North Pole, Canada-Post answers his mail, he holds court in malls and department stores, has elves making gifts that he delivers with a sleigh and by climbing in through the chimney. He used to have **La fée des étoiles** as a helper in the malls but she isn't seen as often these days.

Père Noël is sometimes confused with another character. In Eastern France (Alsace and Lorraine regions) there is a parallel tradition to celebrate [Saint Nicolas](#) on December 6. He is followed by *le Père Fouettard*, who exists also in Germany and Austria (*Krampus*) and in Holland and Belgium (*Zwarte Piet*). *Le Père Fouettard* is a sinister figure dressed in black who accompanies *Saint Nicolas* and whips children who have behaved badly.

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# Santa Claus' reindeer

According to traditional folklore [Santa Claus](#) has a team of flying reindeer which help him deliver [Christmas](#) gifts.

The names of the original eight reindeer are taken from Clement Clarke Moore's 1823 poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, which led to the popularity of reindeer as Christmas symbols.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

Over time, two more reindeer have been added: Rudolph and Robbie, the former a well known name due to the popular Christmas song *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, the latter a media character.

Also, another "reindeer" has shown up. A dog known as Olive the Other Reindeer showed on a Christmas TV special in 1999. Olive thought she was another reindeer ([see below](#)).

According to Moore's poem, the appearance is a "miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer" and they are "more rapid than eagles". Moore himself does not describe them, nor their positions in the sleigh-team, but does say they fly. <sup>[1]</sup>

In some countries, such as Finland, Santa's reindeer do not fly.<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Origins

- The original eight reindeer are drawn from the 1823 poem by Moore.
- Rudolph was added following the publication of Robert L. May's Christmas story in 1939
- Robbie was added by BBC television in aid of Comic Relief, around 1999.



## The reindeer

### Original eight

### Sleigh order

The original eight reindeer are arranged as follows on Santa's sleigh:

#### Front

Dancer Dasher

Vixen Prancer

Cupid Comet

Blitzen Donner

The reindeer on the left are all female, those on the right are all male.

### Descriptions

- *Dasher* - The first reindeer and the right-hand leader of the sleigh before Rudolph was included. He is the speediest reindeer.
- *Dancer* - The second reindeer and the left leader before Rudolph was included. She is the graceful reindeer.
- *Prancer* - The third reindeer and on the right in the second row. He is the most powerful reindeer.
- *Vixen* - The fourth reindeer and on the left-hand side in the second row. She is beautiful, and also powerful like her companion Prancer.
- *Comet* - The fifth reindeer and on the right-hand side in the third row. He brings wonder and happiness to children when Santa flies over everyone's houses.
- *Cupid* - The sixth reindeer and on the left-hand side in the third row. She brings love and joy to children when Santa flies over everyone's houses.
- *Donner* - The seventh reindeer and on the right-hand side in the fourth row. He is the "thunder" reindeer.
- *Blitzen* - The eighth reindeer and on the left-hand side in the fourth row. She is the "lightning" reindeer.

### Meaning of names

Donner and Blitzen mean thunder and lightning respectively.

Some have suggested that Donner's name is actually Donder which means *thunder* in Dutch and German. Some have speculated that Moore named Donner (thunder) in reference to Thor, the Norse God of Thunder.

Blitzen's name is derived from German *Blitze* which means *lightning*. Some have suggested that her name is actually Bliksem which is Dutch for *lightning*. Blitzen was named for lightning to go with Donner who was named for thunder.

(Source: [\[2\]](#))

In *An American Anthology, 1787–1900*, Edmund Clarence Stedman reprints the Moore version of the poem, including the German spelling of "Donder and Blitzen", rather than the earlier Dutch version from 1823, "Dunder and Blixem". Both phrases translate as "Thunder and Lightning" in English, though the German word for thunder is actually "Donner", and the Dutch words would nowadays be "Donder en Bliksem".

## **Additional reindeer since the writing of the poem**

### **Rudolph (the red-nosed reindeer)**

Rudolph's story was originally written in verse by Robert L. May for the Montgomery Ward chain of department stores in 1939 and published as a book to be given to children in the store at [Christmas](#) time.

According to this story, Rudolph was the son of Donner, and was born with a glowing red nose, which made him a social outcast among the other reindeer. However, one Christmas eve it was too foggy for Santa Claus to make his flight around the world. About to cancel, Santa suddenly noticed Rudolph's nose, and decided it could be a makeshift lamp to guide his sleigh. Since then Rudolph has been said to be a permanent member of Santa's team, and leads them on their way.

Rudolph's story is a popular [Christmas story](#) that has been retold in numerous forms including a popular song, a television special, and even a feature film.

### **Robbie (Rudolph's son)**

Robbie was an animated BBC [Christmas](#) comedy television special created in aid of the charity Comic Relief.

### **Olive, the Other Reindeer**

Although not actually a reindeer, Olive is a fictional dog who believes she might be a reindeer. In Matt Groening's 1999 Christmas special *Olive, the Other Reindeer*, the new character is added to the team to lead Santa's sleigh, at least temporarily. The name is a reference to the phonetic sound of the phrase, "All of the other reindeer."

### **See also**

- [Christmas](#)

### **References**

1. <sup>^</sup> Source: <http://mymerrychristmas.com/2005/reindeer.shtml>
2. <sup>^</sup> Note there is some dispute as to authorship of the poem.
3. <sup>^</sup> See: [Joulupukki](#) and the article on Rudolph for more.

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## Tio de Nadal

The ***Tió de Nadal*** (roughly "Christmas log"), also known as "*Tió*" or "*Tronca*" ("log"), is a mythological character in Catalan mythology relating to a Christmas tradition widespread in Catalonia.

The form of the *tió de Nadal* found in many Catalan homes during the holiday season is a hollow log of about 0.3m length, typically standing up on two or four little stick legs with a broad smiling face painted on the higher of the two ends, enhanced by a little red sock hat (a miniature of the traditional Catalan barretina) and often a three-dimensional nose.

Beginning with the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), one gives the *tió* a little bit to "eat" every night and usually covers him with a little blanket so that he will not be cold at night.

On [Christmas](#) day or, depending on the particular household, during a Christmas party, one puts the *tió* partly into the fireplace and orders it to "shit" (the fire part of this tradition is no longer as widespread as it once was, since many modern homes do not have a fireplace). To make him "shit", one beats him with sticks, while singing various songs of *Tió de Nadal*.

The *tió* does not drop larger objects, as those are brought by the Three Wise Men. It does leave candies, nuts and [torrons](#). Depending on the part of Catalonia, it may also give out dried figs. When nothing is left to "shit", it drops a salt herring, a head of garlic, an onion or "urinates". What comes out of the *tió* is a communal rather than individual gift, shared by everyone present.



Beating the Tio de Nadal

In addition to the names listed in the opening paragraph, the additional nickname "***Caga Tió***" ("shit log") derives from the many songs of *Tió de Nadal* that begin with this phrase, which was originally (in the context of the songs) an imperative ("Shit, log"). The use of this expression as a name is not believed to be part of the ancient tradition.

The tradition of the *tió* could be related to that of the [Christmas tree](#).

Here is a song of the "caga tió":

*caga tió,*

*caga turró,  
avellanes i mató,  
si no cagues bé  
et daré un cop de bastó.  
¡caga tió!"*

Shit, log,

shit *torrons*,  
hazelnuts and cheese,  
if you don't shit well  
I'll give you a blow with a stick.  
Shit, log!

After hitting it softly with a stick during the song it is hit harder on the words "¡caga tió!". Then somebody puts his hand under the blanket and takes a gift. The gift is opened and then the song begins again. There are many such songs: this is just an example of a short one.

## See also

- [Caganer](#)

Categories: [Christmas characters](#)

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# Tomte

A **tomte** [ˈtɔ̂mːt] or **nisse** [ˈnʲsː] is a mythical creature of Scandinavian folklore, believed to take care of a farmer's home and barn and protect it from misfortune, in particular at night, when the housefolk were asleep. Tomte is the common Swedish name, derived from his place of residence and area of influence: the house lot or tomt. The Finnish name for him is "tonttu". Nisse is the common name in Norwegian, Danish and the Scanian dialect in southernmost Sweden; it is a nickname for Nils, and its usage in folklore comes from expressions such as Nisse god dreng ("Nisse good lad," cf. Robin Goodfellow).

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## Appearance

The tomte/nisse was often imagined as a small, elderly man (exact size varies from a few inches to about half the height of an adult man), often with a full beard; dressed in the everyday clothing of a farmer. However, there are also folktales where he is believed to be a shapeshifter able to take a shape far larger than an adult man, and other tales where the tomte/nisse is believed to have a single, cyclopean eye. Since he was thought to be skilled in illusions and able to make himself invisible, one was unlikely to get more than brief glimpses of him no matter what he looked like.

## Temperament

Despite his smallness, the tomte/nisse possessed an immense strength. Even though he was protective and caring he was easy to offend, and his retributions ranged from a stout box on the ears to the killing of livestock or ruining of the farm's fortune. The tomte/nisse was a traditionalist who did not like changes in the way things were done at the farm. Another easy way to offend him was rudeness: farm workers swearing, urinating in the barns, or not treating the creatures well would be soundly thrashed. If anyone spilled something on the floor in the house it was wise to shout a warning to the tomte below. An angry tomte is featured in the popular children's book by Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf, *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (*Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Journey Through Sweden*). The tomte turns the naughty boy Nils into a tomte in the beginning of the book, and Nils then travels across Sweden on the back of a goose.

Like many other mythical creatures, one was also required to please him with gifts – a particular gift was a bowl of porridge on Christmas night. If he wasn't given his payment, he would leave the farm or house, or engage in mischief such as tying the cows' tails together in the barn, turning objects upside-down, and breaking things (like a troll). The tomte liked his porridge with a pat of butter on the top. In an often retold story, a farmer put the butter *underneath* the porridge. When the tomte of his farmstead found that the butter was missing, he was filled with rage and killed the cow resting in the barn. But, as he thus became hungry, he went back to his porridge and ate it, and so found the butter at the bottom of the bowl. Full of grief, he then hurried to search the lands to find another farmer with an identical cow, and replaced the former with the latter.

The tomte is connected to farm animals in general, but his most treasured animal was the horse. Belief had it that you could see which horse was the tomte's favourite as it would be especially well taken care of and healthy. Sometimes the tomte would even braid its hair and tail. (These "tomte braids" were in fact most likely caused by insufficient brushing.) Sometimes actually undoing these braids could mean misfortune or angering The tomte.

## The heathen tomte

The tomte was in ancient times believed to be the "soul" of the first inhabitant of the farm. He who cleared the tomt. He had his dwellings in the burial mounds on the farm, hence the now somewhat archaic Swedish names tomtebisse and tomtekarl, Swedish and Norwegian names tomtegubbe, and the Finnish name tonttu-ukko (litt. House lot man) tomtebonde (bonde=farmer) and the Norwegian Haugkall (Mound man). Thus can the tradition of giving porridge to the tomte at Christmas be a reminiscence of ancestral worship.

The tomte was not always a popular figure: Like most creatures of folklore he would be seen as heathen and become connected to the Devil. Farmers believing in the house tomte could be seen as worshipping false gods; in a famous 14th century decree Saint Birgitta warns against the worship of *tompta gudhi*, "tomte gods". Folklore added other negative beliefs about the tomte, such as that having a tomte on the farm meant you put the fate of your soul at risk, or that you had to perform various non-Christian rites to lure a tomte to your farm.

The belief in a tomte's tendency to bring riches to the farm by his unseen work could also be dragged into the conflicts between neighbours. If one farmer was doing far better for himself than the others, someone might say that it was because of him having tomtar on the farm, doing ungodly work and stealing from the neighbours. These rumours could be very damaging for the farmer who found himself accused.

## Similar folklore

The tomte/nisse shares many aspects with other Scandinavian wights such as the Swedish *vättar* (from the Old Norse "landvættir") or the Norwegian *tusser*. These beings are social, however, whereas the tomte is always solitary (though he is now often pictured with other tomtar). Some synonyms of *tomte* in Swedish and Norwegian include *gårdbo* ((farm)yard-dweller) *gardvord* (yard-warden, see *vörður*) *god bonde* (good farmer) *fjøsnisse* (barn gnome) or *gådsrå* (yard-spirit). The tomte could also take a ship for his home, and was then known as a *skeppstomte/skibsnisse*. In other European folklore, there are many beings similar to the tomte, such as the Scots brownie, the German Wichtelmann or the Russian domovoi. The Finnish word *tonttu* has been borrowed from Swedish.

The tomte is one of the most familiar creatures of Scandinavian folklore, and he has appeared in many works of Scandinavian literature. With the romanticisation and collection of folklore during the 19th century, the tomte would gain popularity. In the English editions of the fairy tales of H. C. Andersen the word *nisse* has been inaccurately translated as "goblin" (a more accurate translation is "brownie").

## The modern tomte

In the 1840's the farm's "nisse" became the bearer of Christmas presents in Denmark, and was then called "julenisse". In 1881, the Swedish magazine *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* published Viktor Rydberg's poem *Tomten*, where the tomte is alone awake in the cold Christmas night, pondering the mysteries of life and death. This poem featured the first painting by Jenny Nyström of this traditional Swedish mythical character which she turned into the white-bearded, red-capped friendly figure associated with Christmas ever since. Shortly afterwards, and obviously influenced by the emerging [Father Christmas](#) traditions as well as the new Danish tradition, a variant of the tomte/nisse, called the "jultomte" in Sweden and "julenisse" in Norway, started bringing the Christmas presents in Sweden and Norway, instead of the traditional *julbock* [Yule Goat](#).

Gradually, commercialism has made him look more and more like the American [Santa Claus](#), but the Swedish "jultomte", the Norwegian "julenisse", the Danish "julemand" (as he is more often called today) and the Finnish "joulupukki" (in Finland he is still called the "Yule Goat", although his animal features have disappeared) still has features and traditions that are rooted in the local culture: he doesn't live on the North Pole, but perhaps in a forest nearby, or in Denmark he lives on Greenland, and in Finland he lives in Lapland; he doesn't come down the chimney at night, but through the front door, delivering the presents directly to the children, just like the Yule Goat did; he is not overweight; and even if he nowadays sometimes rides in a sleigh drawn by reindeer, instead of just walking around with his sack, his reindeer don't fly - and many in Sweden still put out a bowl of porridge for him on

Christmas Eve. He is still often pictured on Christmas cards and house and garden decorations as the little man of Jenny Nyström's imagination, often with a horse or cat, or riding on a goat or in a sled pulled by a goat, and for many people the idea of the farm tomte still lives on, if only in the imagination and literature. The use of the word tomte in Swedish is now somewhat ambiguous, but often when one speaks of "jultomten" or "tomten" one is referring to the more modern version, while if one speaks of "tomtarna" (plural) one could also likely be referring to the more traditional tomtar. The traditional word tomte as lives on in an idiom, referring to the human caretaker of a property (hustomten), as well as referring to someone in one's building who mysteriously does someone a favour, such as hanging up ones laundry. A person might also wish for a little *hustomte* to tidy up for them.

### See also

- [Elf](#)
- [Santa Claus](#)

### References

- *Vår svenska tomte*, Ebbe Schön (1996), ISBN 91-27-05573-6

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## Yule Goat

The **Yule Goat** (Sw. *julbock*) is one of the oldest Scandinavian [Christmas](#) symbols. Its origins might go as far back as to pre-Christian days, where goats where connected to the god Thor, who rode the sky in a wagon drawn by goats.

The function of the Yule Goat has differed throughout the ages. As far as until the 19th century, youths would go from house to house during Christmas time to perform small plays or sing Yule Goat songs, with one of the people in the group dressed up as the Yule Goat. During the 19th century its role shifted towards becoming the giver of Christmas gifts, with one of the men in the family dressing up as the Yule Goat. This tradition would have the goat replaced with the *jultomte* ([Santa Claus](#)) at the end of the century, and the tradition of the man-sized goat disappeared.

The Yule Goat can also be a figure, often made out of straw or roughly-hewn wood. In older Scandinavian society a popular prank was to place the Yule Goat in a neighbour's house without them noticing; the family successfully pranked had to get rid of it in the same way. The modern version of the Yule Goat figure is a decorative goat made out of straw and bound with red ribbons, a popular Christmas ornament often found under the [Christmas tree](#). Large versions of this ornament are frequently erected in towns and cities around Christmas time -- these goats tend to be set on fire before Christmas, a tradition that is also illegal and certainly unasked for by the goat makers. The Gävle goat was the first of these goats, and remains the most famous as well as the most burnt down.

NICOLAE SFETCU: ABOUT CHRISTMAS



A Yule Goat from Uppland, Sweden.



Julbocken by John Bauer





Folk tale depiction of [Father Christmas](#) on riding a goat. Perhaps an evolved version of the Swedish [Tomte](#).

## See also

- [Joulupukki](#)

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## Yule Lads

The **Yule Lads**, or Yulemen, (Icelandic: *jólasveinarnir*) are the Icelandic [santa clauses](#). Their number has varied throughout the ages, but currently they are considered to be thirteen.

Their names, and the dates on which they appear are:

- *Stekkjastaur* (Sheepfold Stick) – December 12
- *Giljagaur* (Gilly Oaf) – December 13
- *Stúfur* (Shorty) – December 14
- *Þvörusleikir* (Spoon-licker) – December 15
- *Pottasleikir* (Pot-licker) – December 16
- *Askasleikir* (Bowl-licker) – December 17
- *Hurðaskellir* (Door-slammer) – December 18
- *Skyrgámur* (Skyr-glutton) – December 19
- *Bjúgnakrækir* (Sausage-pilfer) – December 20
- *Gluggagægir* (Peeper) – December 21
- *Gáttaþefur* (Sniffer) – December 22
- *Ketkrókur* (Meat-hook) – December 23

- *Kertasníkir* (Candle-beggar) – December 24

The Yule Lads were originally considered to be very bad news - they were pranksters that tortured the farmers, as can be seen from their names.

The Yule Lads are said to be the sons of *Grýla* and *Leppalúði*, vicious trolls that live in the mountains. *Grýla* is ancient - her name is even mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's thirteenth century Edda. *Grýla* is said to wander down from the mountains in search of children that she puts in her sack. *Grýla* is definitely the dominant member in the relationship and generally considered more terrifying - even sometimes said to have hooves and a tail. Another prominent member of the family is the Yuletide Cat, a beast much feared by children. It was said that the cat would eat any child that didn't get a new article of clothing in time for Christmas. This believe lingers in the Icelandic language in the form a saying: "You don't want to go to the Yuletide Cat."

In modern times the Yule Lads have taken on a more benevolent role as they slowly merge with [Santa Claus](#). They have taken up his costume, and nowadays little children in Iceland place their shoes in the window for thirteen days prior to Christmas, and each night a little gift is left in the shoe from the Yule Lad that came down from the mountains that night.

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# Christmas movie

A **Christmas movie** is a movie based on the holiday [Christmas](#).

Most Christmas movies are intended to leave the audience feeling good after viewing, and almost always have a happy ending. Other films have been set during the Christmas period but do not have Christmas as their theme. Often such films are planned for release during the lucrative Christmas-New Year's holiday season when filmgoers traditionally take in movies in large numbers. An example is *Die Hard*.

## List of Christmas movies

- All I Want for Christmas (1991)
- Bright Eyes (1934)
- Bush Christmas (1983)
- Carol for Another Christmas (1964)
- A Charlie Brown Christmas (1965)
- Christmas Burglars (1908)
- Christmas Child (2003)
- A Christmas Carol (several versions)
- Christmas in Connecticut (1945)
- A Christmas Story (1983)
- The Christmas Wife (1988 TV)
- A Christmas Without Snow (1980 TV)
- Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966 TV), (2000)
- A Dream for Christmas (1973 TV)
- Elf (2003)
- Ernest Saves Christmas (1988)
- The Family Man (2000)
- Frosty the Snowman (1969 TV)
- Guess Who's Coming for Christmas? (1990 TV)
- Holiday Affair (1949)
- Home Alone (1990)
- Home Alone 2: Lost in New York (1992)
- Home Alone 3 (1997)
- Home Alone 4 (2002)
- I'll Be Home for Christmas (1998)
- It's A Wonderful Life (1946)
- Jingle All the Way (1996)
- The Little Drummer Boy (1968 TV)
- Miracle on 34th Street (1947)
- Mixed Nuts (1994)
- Mr. Krueger's Christmas (1980 TV)
- National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989)
- Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993)

Prancer (1989)  
Remember the Night (1940)  
Scrooged (1988)  
Stealing Christmas (2003 TV)  
The Santa Clause (1994)  
The Santa Clause 2 (2002)  
The Santa Clause 3 (2006)  
Trapped in Paradise (1994)  
A Very Brady Christmas (1998 TV)  
White Christmas (1954)

### **Movies set during the Christmas season**

- Gremlins (1984)  
Die Hard (1988)  
Look Who's Talking Now (1989)  
Love Actually (2003)  
[[Jaws 4-The Revenge][198?]  
The Shop Around the Corner (1940)  
Metropolitan (1990)  
While You Were Sleeping (1995)  
The Ref (1994)  
Mixed Nuts (1994)

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## **Christmas television special**

### **American television**

In American television, a [Christmas television special](#) is typically a one-time, half-hour program aired during the Christmas season. Some are extended episodes of currently running television series featuring the regular characters dealing with Christmas. Some specials are of a more variety show nature, featuring celebrities and/or singers and musical numbers and short skits. Many are animated cartoon productions aimed at children, intended to be outgrown by one generation and picked up by a new generation of children.

All such specials are naturally strongly Christmas-themed, but usually forgo the religious aspects of the holiday to concentrate on more general themes of giving, and goodwill towards others. Such secular icons of the season as [Santa Claus](#) often figure prominently in these specials as well.

Christmas television specials are also where non-animated characters from other media may first cross over into animation; examples include the Peanuts comic strip, the Bloom

County comic strip, and the Dr. Seuss children's book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. The first episode of *The Simpsons* (1989) was a Christmas special, also known as "Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire."

The Rankin-Bass animation studio is well known for its many holiday specials, including the stop-motion *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, which CBS has shown annually since 1964, and the animated *Frosty the Snowman*.

## **British television**

In British television, a Christmas special is a one-off episode of a regular television series which may not otherwise be running in the winter or even that year, as in Britain television series tend to run on limited schedules of 6 to 13 episodes rather than year-round. Successive series of a program may run in non-consecutive years so a Christmas special may be of a series for which no other episodes have aired that year (or possibly for several years).

A Christmas special may or may not have a Christmas theme and often is not even set during the Christmas season but usually runs on Christmas day itself and is often longer than a regular episode of the series. There are noticeable patterns in Christmas specials, particularly in dramas and sitcoms, whereby the characters either have to endure Christmas Day in a typically unfestive manner (and thus allowing the writers to include plenty of clichés associated with the season), or they are taken out of their environment and go on holiday to an exotic location - an idea which can also occur in spin-off films.

Some examples include:

- Morecambe and Wise - once something of an institution at Christmas  
The Office specials  
Doctor Who's *The Christmas Invasion*  
Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends: *Thomas' Christmas Party* (also aired in the USA)  
Father Ted - *A Christmassy Ted* (1996)  
Blackadder's *Christmas Carol* (1989)  
*It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)  
Only Fools And Horses – Christmas specials (various)  
The Snowman (1982)  
The Vicar of Dibley – Christmas specials (various)  
Wallace & Gromit – *A Close Shave* (1995)

## **Examples of American Christmas television specials**

- *A Christmas Carol* (1938 film) with Reginald Owen  
*The Shop Around the Corner* with Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan (1940)  
*Holiday Inn* (film) with Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire (1942)  
*Christmas in Connecticut* with Barbara Stanwyck and Dennis Morgan (1945)  
*It's a Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart (1946)  
*Miracle on 34th Street* (1947)  
*The Bishop's Wife* with Cary Grant, Loretta Young and David Niven (1947)  
*The Lemon Drop Kid* with Bob Hope (1951)

Bob Hope Christmas Special (1953)  
White Christmas (film) with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye (1954)  
The Honeymooners: 'Twas the Night Before Christmas" (1955)  
I Love Lucy Christmas Show (1956)  
Happy Holidays with Frank and Bing starring Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby (1957)  
The Andy Griffith Show: Christmas Story (1960)  
The Bing Crosby Christmas Show (1961)  
Mister Magoo's Christmas Carol (1962)  
The Bing Crosby Christmas Show (1962)  
The Beverly Hillbillies: Home for Christmas (1962)  
Judy Garland Show Christmas Special (1963)  
The Dick van Dyke Show: The Alan Brady Show Presents (1963)  
The Promise (1963) [narrated by Bing Crosby]  
The Beverly Hillbillies: Christmas at the Clampetts (1963)  
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (1964, Rankin-Bass)  
The Bing Crosby Christmas Show (1965)  
A Charlie Brown Christmas (1965)  
Bob Hope Christmas Show (1965)  
The Hollywood Palace with Bing Crosby (1965))  
How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966)  
The Hollywood Palace with Bing Crosby (1966)  
The Bob Hope Vietnam Christmas Show (1966)  
The Hollywood Palace with Bing Crosby (1967)  
The Little Drummer Boy (1968, Rankin-Bass)  
The Hollywood Palace with Bing Crosby (1968)  
The Bob Hope Christmas Special (1968)  
Bing and Carol Together Again for the First Time (1969) Bing Crosby, with Carol Burnett  
Frosty the Snowman (1969, Rankin-Bass)  
The Bob Hope Christmas Special: Around the World with the USO (1969)  
Bing Crosby's Christmas Show (1970)  
Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town (1970, Rankin-Bass)  
Scrooge (1970 film) with Albert Finney  
The Bob Hope Christmas Special (1970)  
Bing Crosby and the Sounds of Christmas (1971)  
The Homecoming: A Christmas Story (The Waltons)(1971)  
The Bob Hope Vietnam Christmas Show (1971)  
The Andy Williams Christmas Show (1971)  
A Christmas with the Bing Crosbys (1972)  
M\*A\*S\*H (TV series): Dear Dad (1972)  
Bing Crosby's Sun Valley Christmas Show (1973)  
'Twas the Night Before Christmas (1974, Rankin-Bass)  
Christmas with the Bing Crosbys (1974)  
The Year Without a Santa Claus (1974, Rankin-Bass)

Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus (1974)  
Little House on the Prairie (TV series): Christmas at Plum Creek (1974)  
The First Christmas: The Story of the First Christmas Snow (1975, Rankin-Bass)  
Merry Christmas, Fred, from the Crosbys (1975) Bing Crosby, with Fred Astaire  
John Denver's Rocky Mountain Christmas (1975)  
The Bing Crosby White Christmas Special (1976)  
The Waltons: The Best Christmas (1976)  
Perry Como's Olde English Christmas (1977)  
Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas (1977) with David Bowie  
The Bob Hope All Star Christmas Comedy Special (1977)  
The Waltons: The Children's Carol (1977)  
Three's Company: Three's Christmas (1977)  
Eight is Enough: Yes Nicholas, there is a Santa Claus (1977)  
Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas (1977)  
The Fat Albert Christmas Special (1977)  
The Carpenters at Christmas (1977)  
Raggedy Ann and Andy in: The Great Santa Claus Caper (1978, directed by Chuck Jones)  
The Star Wars Holiday Special (1978)  
A Special Sesame Street Christmas (1978)  
The Pink Panther's Christmas (1978)  
Perry Como's Early American Christmas (1978)  
The Carpenters: A Christmas Portrait (1978)  
M\*A\*S\*H (TV series): Dear Sis (1978)  
Bugs Bunny's Looney Christmas Tales (1979)  
Perry Como's Christmas in New Mexico (1979)  
John Denver and the Muppets: A Christmas Together (1979)  
An American Christmas Carol with Henry Winkler (1979)  
Perry Como's Christmas in the Holy Land (1980)  
The Bob Hope Christmas Special (1980)  
The Osmond Family Christmas Special (1980)  
Yogi's First Christmas (1980)  
M\*A\*S\*H (TV series): Death Takes a Holiday (1980)  
A Chipmunk Christmas (1981)  
Perry Como's French-Canadian Christmas (1981)  
The Bob Hope Christmas Special (1981)  
George Burns' Early, Early, Early Christmas Special (1981)  
M\*A\*S\*H (TV series): 'Twas the Day after Christmas (1981)  
Christmas Eve on Sesame Street (1982)  
Little House on the Prairie (TV series): A Christmas They Never Forgot (1982)  
The Smurfs' Christmas Special (1982)  
Christmas Comes to Pac-Land (1982)  
John Denver and the Muppets: Rocky Mountain Holiday (1982)  
Mickey's Christmas Carol (1983)  
A Christmas Story with Peter Billingsley (1983}

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever with Loretta Swit (1983)  
A Christmas Carol (1984 film) with George C. Scott  
Little House on the Prairie (TV series): Bless All The Dear Children (1984)  
Bob Hope's USO Christmas in Beirut (1984)  
Santa Claus: The Movie with Dudley Moore and John Lithgow (1985)  
He-Man and She-Ra: A Christmas Special (1985)  
The Bob Hope Christmas Show (1985)  
The Christmas Gift with John Denver and Jane Kaczmarek (1986)  
The Christmas Toy (1986)  
The Golden Girls: 'Twas the Nightmare Before Christmas (1986)  
Bob Hope Winterfest Christmas Show (1987)  
A Claymation Christmas Celebration (1987)  
A Garfield Christmas (1987)  
Julie Andrews: The Sound of Christmas (1987)  
A Muppet Family Christmas (1987)  
Bob Hope's USO Christmas from the Persian Gulf: Around the World in Eight Days (1987)  
The Brady Bunch: A Very Brady Christmas (1988)  
Bob Hope's Jolly Christmas Show (1988)  
Pee-wee's Playhouse Christmas Special (1988)  
National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989)  
The Golden Girls: Have Yourself a Very Little Christmas (1989)  
Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire (1989)  
Home Alone with Macaulay Culkin (1990)  
Shining Time Station: 'Tis A Gift (1990)  
Roseanne (TV series): Santa Claus (1991)  
A Wish for Wings That Work (1991)  
Winnie the Pooh and Christmas Too (1991)  
Bob Hope's Christmas Cheer from Saudi Arabia (1991)  
The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992)  
Home Alone 2: Lost in New York with Macaulay Culkin (1992)  
Rugrats: The Santa Experience (1992)  
Inspector Gadget Saves Christmas (1992)  
It's Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown (1992)  
Roseanne (TV series): It's No Place Like Home for The Holidays (1992)  
It's a Wonderful Tiny Toons Christmas Special (1992)  
Hope for the Holidays - A Bob Hope Christmas (1993)  
Roseanne (TV series): White Trash Christmas (1993)  
A Flintstones Family Christmas (1993)  
The Santa Clause with Tim Allen (1994)  
A Flintstones Christmas Carol (1994)  
Perry Como's Irish Christmas (1994)  
Rocko's Modern Christmas: Can't Squeeze Cheer From a Cheese Log (1994)  
Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree (1995)  
A Pinky and the Brain Christmas (1995)



The Nanny: Oy to the World (1995)  
The Vicar of Dibley: The Christmas Lunch Incident (1996)  
Roseanne (TV series): Home for the Holidays (1996)  
The Munsters' Scary Little Christmas (1996)  
Sonic Christmas Blast (1996)  
Arnold's Christmas (1997)  
Jack Frost (1998 film) with Michael Keaton and Kelly Preston  
The Vicar of Dibley: Winter (1999)  
Olive, the Other Reindeer (1999)  
The SpongeBob SquarePants Christmas Special (2000)  
The Fairly OddParents in: Christmas Every Day (2001)  
A Very Special Family Guy Freakin' Christmas (2001)  
Charlie Brown's Christmas Tales (2002)  
It's a Very Merry Muppet Christmas Movie (2002)  
Rugrats: Babies in Toyland (2002)  
I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown (2003)  
The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius: Holly Jolly Jimmy (2003)  
A Rocket Xmas (2003)  
A Johnny Bravo Christmas (2003)  
ChalkZone: When Santas Collide (2004)  
My Life as a Teenage Robot: A Robot for All Seasons (2004)  
All Grown Up!: The Finster Who Stole Christmas (2004)  
Ed, Edd n Eddy's Jingle Jingle Jangle (2004)  
Billy and Mandy Save Christmas (2005)  
Danny Phantom: The Fright Before Christmas (2005)

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# Christmas food

This page is a **list of [Christmas](#) dishes** as eaten around the world.

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## Belgium

- Cougnou (or *cougnolle*), sweet bread in the form of the infant Jesus

## Canada

- Apple cider
- [Yule Log](#)
- [Candy canes](#)
- [Christmas pudding](#)
- [Eggnog](#)
- [Fruitcake](#)
- [Pumpkin Pie](#)
- [Gingerbread](#), often in the form of a Gingerbread house or Gingerbread man
- Ham
- Pâté à la viande
- Roast turkey

- [Tourtière](#)
- Shortbread
- Stuffing

## Czech Republic

The traditional meal (served as the dinner on the [Christmas Eve](#)) consists of fish soup and fried fish (most often, carp) served with potato salad. It should be the first food consumed that day.

Before the Christmas holidays, many kinds of sweet biscuits are prepared.

## Denmark

- Apple dumplings (*Æbleskiver*) sprinkled with powdered sugar and served with strawberry marmalade  
Boiled potatoes  
Brown sauce (*Brun sovs*)  
Browned potatoes (*Brunede kartofler*)  
Christmas beer (*Juleøl*)
- [Glogg](#) (*Gløg*)
- [Rice pudding with almonds](#) (*Risalamande*) served with cherry sauce (*kirsebærsauce*)
- Roast duck (*Andesteg*) served with apples and prunes  
Red cabbage (*Rødkål*)

## Finland

- Freshly salted salmon (*Graavilohi*)
- Rosolli salad of pickled herring and boiled vegetables (*Rosolli*)
- Baked ham with mustard (*Kinkku*)
- Turkey (*Kalkkuna*)
- Raw-pickled slightly salted salmon (*Kylmäsavuohi*)
- Carrot Casserole (*Porkkanalaatikko*)
- Potato Casserole (*Perunalaatikko* or *tuuvinki*)
- Swede pudding, rutabaga casserole (*Lanttulaatikko*)
- Liver Casserole (*Maksalaatikko*)
- Mixed fruit soup or prune soup (*Sekahedelmäkiisseli*, *luumukiisseli*)
- [Rice pudding](#) or rice porridge with cinnamon, sugar and cold milk or with mixed fruit soup (*Riisipuuro*)
- [Glogg](#) or [mulled wine](#) (*Glögi*)
- Prune jam pastries (*Joulutortut*)
- [Gingerbread](#), sometimes in the form of a Gingerbread house or Gingerbread man (*Piparkakut*)

## France

- [Bûche de Noël](#)
- Foie gras  
Nougat noir au miel  
Kouglof traditionnel
- [Ganzeltopf](#)
- Berauwecka

## Germany

- [Pfeffernüsse](#)
- Glühwein
- Lebkuchen
- Christstollen
- Hexenhäuserl
- Springerle
- Plätzchen

## Italy

- [Panettone](#) (Milan)

## Japan

- Christmas cake - Different from a U.K. [Christmas cake](#) or American [fruitcake](#), the Japanese Christmas cake is usually sponge cake frosted with whipped cream, and topped with strawberries.

Contrary to popular myth and KFC advertisements, chicken karaage (fried chicken) is not a traditional Christmas meal in Japan. The Christmas holiday in Japan is akin to the Valentine's Day holiday in countries like America, often celebrated by couples with meals in upscale restaurants. As such, there is no specific traditional meal.

## Lithuania

12-dishes Christmas Eve Supper plays the main role in Lithuanian Christmas tradition. Thus the traditional dishes are served on December 24th.

- Poppy milk (aguons pienas)  
Slizikai (šližikai')
- Ausels (Deep fried dumplings)
- Herring with carrots (silk su morkomis')
- Herring with mushrooms (silk su grybais')

## New Zealand

- Pavlova

## Norway

- [Gløgg](#) (drink)
- Julepølse
- [Lutefisk](#)
- [Pinnekjøtt](#)
- Svineribbe

## Poland

- [Kutia](#)

## Serbia

- Fish soup (*for the Christmas Eve*)
- Koljivo
- [esnica](#)

## Spain

- [Turrón](#)

## Sweden

- Köttbullar - Swedish meatballs
- Julskinka - Christmas ham
- Inlagd sill - Pickled herring (you usually have all different kinds of sill as well)
- Julbord - Christmas smorgasbord (julsbord really means all the dishes you eat at christmas together)
- Rödkål - Sweet and sour red cabbage
- [Julmust](#) - A traditional very sweet stout-like, Christmas soft drink
- [Glögg](#) - [Mulled wine](#)
- [Knäck](#) - Christmas toffee
- Prinskorv - Small sausages
- Revbensspjäll - Meat on bones
- Pepparkaka - Gingerbread
- Gravad lax - Graved salmon
- Julost - Christmas cheese
- [Julgröt](#) - Rice pudding

## United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the traditional meal consists of roast turkey or goose, served with roast potatoes and other vegetables, followed by [Christmas pudding](#), a heavy boiled pudding made with dried fruit (traditionally plums) and flour.

- [Brandy butter](#)
- Chocolate yule log
- [Christmas cake](#)
- [Christmas pudding](#)
- Dundee cake
- [Mince pie](#)
- Roast turkey
  - Snap-dragons
  - Stuffing
  - Gravy
  - roast beef
  - roast duck
  - roast goose
  - Brussels Sprouts

## United States

- Apple cider
- [Candy canes](#)
- Champagne, or sparkling apple cider
- [Christmas cookies](#)
- Cranberry sauce
- [Eggnog](#)
- [Fruitcake](#)
- [Gingerbread](#), often in the form of a Gingerbread house or Gingerbread man
- Honey ham
- Hot chocolate
- [Marzipan](#)
- Pie
  - Apple pie
  - Pecan pie
  - [Pumpkin pie](#)
- Roast turkey, less often roast duck or roast goose
- Smithfield ham, often served on a biscuit or a roll
- Stuffing also known as Dressing in the Southern United States

## Venezuela

- [Hallaca](#)

- Pan de jamón (ham-filled bread)

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## Bebinca

**Bebinca** is a dessert from Goa, India. The ingredients include eggs and coconut milk. The dish is prepared and consumed during [Christmas](#) time. Traditionally this desert is baked over a slow fire and one turns the Bebinca upside down before eating.

This food is also popular in the Philippines, spelled "bibingka." In the Philippine style, sliced salted duck eggs are added into the batter before cooking (the cooking process is similar to the bebinca). Before being served, butter or margarine is spread and sugar is sprinkled over the bibingka.

"Bebinca" was also adopted by the International Weather System as a typhoon name.

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## Bethmannchen

**Bethmännchen** (German for "a little Bethmann") is a pastry made from [marzipan](#) with almond, powdered sugar, rosewater, flour and egg which is usually specially baked for [Christmas](#).

The name is given from the family of Simon Moritz von Bethmann in Frankfurt am Main (Germany).

Legend has it that Parisian pastry chef Jean Jacques Gautenier developed the recipe at his home in 1838.

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## Brandy butter

**Brandy butter** is a sweet, rich sauce, usually consumed with traditional desserts during the [Christmas](#) and New Year period in the UK.

### Description

Brandy butter is a blend of soft dark brown sugar, unsalted butter and brandy. Refrigerated until it is relatively hard, it is typically served cold to provide a contrast with hot desserts such as:

- [Christmas pudding](#) (alternatively known as plum pudding).
- Freshly baked or microwaved [Mince pies](#).

As such, it is a seasonal alternative to cream, ice cream or custard.

### Trivia

In 1998 a number of newspapers carried a story regarding European Union rules that the labelling of dairy products as butter required a minimum of 75% milk fat, and that brandy butter, falling below this requirement was to be renamed 'brandy spreadable fat'. The Sun newspaper erroneously reported, "That great British Christmas treat, brandy butter, is to be outlawed by the order of the EU. Brussels says it doesn't have enough butter in it." **The Sun, 22 June 1998, p. 8.**

This interpretation of the regulations could be classified as a Euromyth. In actual fact the legislation contained an exemption specifically to accommodate brandy butter and similar alcoholic sauces.

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## Bredela

**Bredela** (also referred to as **Bredele**, **Bredle** or **Winachtsbredele**) are biscuits or small cakes traditionally baked in Alsace (France) especially during the [Christmas](#) period. Many varieties can be found, including new ones, so that assortments can be created. They can include *anisbredela* (cake with egg white and aniseed) *butterbredle*, *schwowebredle* (orange and cinnamon), *spritzbredle*, small *pain d'épices* and spice cakes that are made with sugar rather than honey.

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## Buche de Noel

**Bûche de Noël** ("[Yule Log](#)") is a traditional French dessert served during the [Christmas](#) holidays. As the name indicates, the cake is generally prepared, presented, and garnished so as to look like a log ready for the fire. The traditional bûche is made from a Génoise or other sponge cake, generally baked in a large, shallow jelly roll pan, frosted, rolled to form a cylinder, and frosted again on the outside. The most common combination is a basic yellow sponge cake, frosted and filled with chocolate buttercream, however, many variations on the traditional recipe exist, possibly including chocolate cakes and espresso or otherwise-flavored frostings and fillings. Bûches are often served with a portion of one end of the cake cut off and set on top of the cake to resemble a chopped off branch, and bark-like texture is often produced in the buttercream for further realism. They are commonly decorated with powdered sugar to resemble snow, tree branches, fresh berries, and mushrooms made of meringue.

One popular story behind the creation of this dessert is that Napoleon I of France issued a proclamation requiring households in Paris to keep their chimneys closed during the winter, based on the notion that cold air caused medical problems. This prevented Parisians from being able to use their fireplaces, and, thus, prevented them from engaging in many of the traditions surrounding and involving the hearth in French Christmas tradition. French bakers, according to the theory, invented this dessert as a symbolic replacement around which the family could gather for story-telling and other holiday merriment.

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## Bunuelo

**Buñuelos** (alternatively spelled *bimuelos*, *birmuelos*, *bermuelos*, *burmuelos*, *bunyols*) are fritters of a mainly Mexican origin and are traditionally eaten at [Christmas](#). To make buñelos, a yeasted dough with a hint of anise is deep-fried, then drenched in a syrup of brown sugar, cinnamon, and guava.

There are references to buñelos in Mallorca; there also exist *bunelos* in Turkey, India, and Cuba; *bunuelos* are in Russia.

Southwestern buñuelos are coated with sugar and cinnamon and are similar to malasadas).

Popular types of breads in Mijas include buñuelos and homazos. The Spanish have an appetite for mixing the sweet and savoury, a tradition which has its origins in Arabic culture, as the Moorish invaders also combined different types of food in one meal.

Buñelos are commonly served in Mexico with powdered sugar or hot sugar cane syrup (*piloncillo*) and are sold in fairs, carnivals, and Christmas events such as [posadas](#) or pastorellas.

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## Bunuelos

**Buñuelos** are a traditional Hispanic dessert. They typically consist of a simple, wheat-based yeast dough that is thinly rolled, cut or shaped into individual pieces, then fried and finished off with a sweet topping. In Colombia, is usually cooked during Christmas time, along with natilla. In Cuba, they are traditionally twisted in a pretzel-shape and covered in an anise caramel. In Mexico and other countries in Latin America they are often dusted with a cinnamon and sugar topping and served hot.

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## Candy cane

A **candy cane** is a hard cane-shaped candy stick. It is traditionally white with red stripes and flavored with peppermint; however, it is also made in a variety of other flavors and colored stripes. The candy cane is a traditional candy surrounding the [Christmas](#) holiday, although it is possible to find them throughout the year.

The candy cane was originally a straight, hard, and all-white candy stick. The cane shape is traditionally credited to a choirmaster at Cologne Cathedral in Germany, who, legend has it, in 1670 bent straight sugar sticks into canes to represent a shepherd's staff, and gave them to children at church services. Whether the choirmaster had the "Good Shepherd" in mind is unknown. Peppermint candy with red stripes first appeared in the mid-19th century in the Swedish town of Gränna , and striped candy canes in the early 20th century.

### Urban legends about the origin of candy canes

Apocryphal tales suggesting the candy cane was created wholecloth (usually by an American Protestant, usually described as being an unnamed candy maker in 1870s Indiana) to represent Jesus (white for his purity, red for the blood he shed, and the general shape for the J in his name and the cane of the shepards) have become popular in recent years. These are recently created stories with no factual basis.

### Other uses

Candy canes are sometimes ground up and used as a topping for foods such as ice cream or as an additive to drinks such as hot chocolate. They are also hung as decorations on [Christmas trees](#).

The British confectionery called "seaside rock" is manufactured in a similar fashion.

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## Cesnica

**esnica** is a kind of soda bread made on [Christmas](#) morning, in Serbian tradition. A solid silver coin along with wood and a bean for health and good luck is placed into the bread. During the Christmas Breakfast (being the most important meal of Christmas in Serbian tradition) family members break the esnica and the one who finds the coin in the piece of bread is considered to be most fortunate that year; however, the head of the family has to buy the coin so it stays in the house. Sometimes, there are other things put in *esnica*, like piece of badnjak, also called the Yule Log – good luck, hazelnut – health, plum – traveling, etc.

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## Christmas cake

**Christmas cake** is a type of [fruitcake](#) served at [Christmas](#) time in the UK, Ireland and many Commonwealth countries.

A Christmas cake may be light or dark, crumbly-moist to sticky-wet, spongy to heavy, leavened or unleavened, shaped round, square or oblong as whole cakes, cupcakes ("fairy cakes" in England), or petit fours, with frosting, icing, glazing, dusting with confectioner's sugar, or plain, etc.

A particular favourite of many is the traditional Scottish Christmas cake, the Whisky Dundee. As the name implies, the cake originated in Dundee and is made with Scotch whisky. It is a light and crumbly cake, and light on fruit and candied peel—only currants, raisins (sultanas) and cherries. This Christmas cake is particularly good for people who don't like very rich and moist cakes. As with all fruitcakes, the almonds (or other nuts) can be omitted by people who don't like them.

At the other end of the Christmas cake continuum, the apple creme Christmas cake is a rich mix of finely sliced apples, raisins and other fruit, with eggs, cream cheese, and heavy whipping cream.

In the middle of the spectrum is the mincemeat Christmas cake, which is simply any traditional or vegetarian mincemeat mixed with flour, eggs, etc., to transform it into a cake batter; or it can also be steamed as a [Christmas pudding](#).

## Christmas cake in other countries

In Japan, Christmas cake, traditionally eaten on [Christmas Eve](#), is simply a sponge cake, frosted with whipped cream, decorated with strawberries, and usually topped with Christmas chocolates or other seasonal fruit. By extension, Japanese women over the age of 25 have occasionally been called "Christmas cake" to express the traditional Japanese idea that women over 25 are undesirable as marriage partners. This is a play on the idea that Christmas cake is no longer desirable after the 25th. However, as the age at marriage has increased, this metaphor has begun to be replaced with toshikoshi-soba, a noodle dish traditionally eaten on the 31st.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the Philippines, [Christmas](#) cakes are rich yellow pound cakes with macerated nuts or fruitcakes of the British fashion. Either way, both are soaked in copious amounts of brandy

or rum mixed with a simple syrup of palm sugar and water. Traditionally, civet or ambergris musk flavoring is added, but rosewater or orange flower water is more common now, as civet musk and ambergris have become very expensive. These liquor-laden cakes can usually stay fresh for many months provided it is handled and made properly. Because of its long shelf life, it is a very popular type of gift for [Christmas](#) and one cake made the previous year is sometimes saved for the next Christmas to symbolize union with "Christmases past", or may be consumed for the following Easter.

## References

1. [^](#) Hendry, Joy (2003). *Understanding Japanese Society, Third Edition*. London: Routledge.

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## Christmas cookies

**Christmas cookies** are traditionally sugar cookies (though other flavors may be used based on family traditions and individual preferences) cut into various shapes related to [Christmas](#). In the United States, since the 1930s, children have left cookies and milk on a table for [Santa Claus](#) on [Christmas Eve](#), though many people simply consume the cookies themselves. The cookies are often cut into such shapes as those of [candy canes](#), reindeer, and holly leaves. Oreos are also popular.

## See also

- [Lebkuchen](#)
- [gingerbread](#)
- [Spritzgebäck](#)
- [Pfeffernusse](#)

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## Christmas ham

The **Christmas Ham** is an ancient traditional ingredient in the Swedish [Christmas](#) celebration and remains as important there as the [Christmas tree](#).

Before the arrival of Christianity to Scandinavia, a pig was sacrificed to the god Freyr at the Yule celebrations and eaten. This tradition of butchering a pig at Christmas continued after the Christianization and survives as several dishes (sausages and bread dipped in pork fat) of which the Christmas ham is the most central.

Among commoners, the Christmas ham was usually saved for the summer, whereas more wealthy people ate it at Christmas.

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## Christmas pudding

**Christmas pudding** is the dessert traditionally served on [Christmas](#) day in Britain and Ireland, as well as in some Commonwealth countries. It has its origins in England, and is sometimes known as **plum pudding**, though this can also refer to other kinds of boiled pudding involving a lot of dried fruit.

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### Basics

Many households have their own recipe for Christmas pudding, often handed down the family.

Christmas pudding is a boiled, or rather steamed, pudding, massively heavy with dried fruit and nuts, and usually made with suet. It should be very dark in appearance - effectively black - and moist with brandy and other alcohol (some recipes call for dark beers such as mild, stout or porter). In Peru, some families use Pisco.

Traditionally, Christmas puddings were boiled in a pudding cloth, and they are often represented as round, but at least since the beginning of the twentieth century they have usually been prepared in basins.

### The wish and other traditions

Traditionally puddings were made on or immediately after the Sunday "next before Advent", i.e. five weeks before Christmas. The Collect for that Sunday in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, as it was used from the sixteenth century (and still is in traditional churches), reads:

"Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen"

The day became known as "Stir-up Sunday". Traditionally everyone in the household, or at least every child, gave the mixture a stir, and made a wish while doing so.

It was common practice to include small silver coins in the pudding mixture, which could be kept by the person whose serving included them. The usual choice was a silver 3d piece, or a sixpence. The coin was believed to bring wealth in the coming year. However this practice fell away once real silver coins were not available, as it was believed that alloy coins would taint the pudding. The practice has largely stopped for reasons of safety and liability.

Other tokens are also known to have been included, such as a tiny wishbone (to bring good luck), a silver thimble (for thrift), or an anchor (to symbolise safe harbour).

Once turned out of its basin, the Christmas pudding is traditionally decorated with a spray of holly, and it may be doused in brandy, flamed (or 'fired'), and brought to the table ceremonially - where it may be greeted with a round of applause. In some houses the lights are turned out as the pudding is brought in amid a halo of purple brandy flames (this is related to the Christmas tradition of snap-dragons). It can be eaten with hard sauce, brandy butter, rum butter, cream (lemon cream is excellent) or custard and is often sprinkled with caster sugar (the fall of the sugar on triangular slices resembling the fall of snow on a pitched roof, or snowy mountain tops).

## After Christmas

Christmas puddings have very good keeping properties and many families keep one back from Christmas to be eaten at another celebration later in the year, often at [Easter](#). Some take the practice so far as to make each year's pudding the *previous* Christmas. Others claim that this impairs the flavour, but admit that a well-made pudding will keep at least adequately for a year.

Christmas puddings can be bought ready made and cooked, but unless they come from a luxury shop these are likely to be a poor substitute for a home-cooked pudding. Nowadays, many people find the Christmas pudding too rich and heavy (especially after lots of rich food on the morning of Christmas, then a starter and a large main course for the main meal), but most families have at least one member who will demand that a "proper" Christmas pudding be cooked.

## See also

- [List of Christmas dishes](#)

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## Cranberry sauce

**Cranberry sauce** is a sauce or relish made out of cranberries.

The cranberries are boiled with sugar and often other ingredients such as orange juice or zest. Cranberry sauce may be condensed or jellied and thus shaped like a cylinder due to the shape of steel cans that often contain the sauce, or may be loose and uncondensed. Cranberry

sauce is often eaten in conjunction with turkey for [Christmas](#) dinner in the UK and for Thanksgiving dinner in the US, and it is only rarely eaten in other contexts.

In the U.S., most cranberry sauce (and cranberry products in general) is produced by the company Ocean Spray.

Some varieties of cranberry sauce may not be appropriate for vegetarians as it may contain gelatin.

## Cranberry Trivia

John Lennon repeated the words *Cranberry sauce* at the end of the song Strawberry Fields Forever, a fact that Lennon confirmed in a 1980 Playboy interview. He stated it was a kind of icing on the cake of the weirdness of song, where anything he might have imagined saying would have been appropriate.

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## Eggnog

**Eggnog** (or **egg nog**) is a type of milk-based beverage popular in North America during the winter. Historically, it likely belongs to the posset family. But its actual origins, significance and, most importantly, ingredients are subject to dispute and conjecture. The name is a concatenation of egg and nog, where nog derives either from noggin (ale or a small wooden cup) or from grog (an alcoholic beverage made with rum). Most likely, eggnog originated in Europe. Another origin story has it that it was an occasional fortifying drink in the American colonies, who adapted it with cheap rum to make it a more formidable winter treat.

Modern eggnog typically consists of milk, eggs, and sugar mixed together and may be served with or without added spirits. Other ingredients include spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon, or allspice, and frequently the substitution of cream for some portion of the milk, making a much richer drink. Other toppings are vanilla ice cream, eggnog flavored ice cream, and whipped cream.

Eggnog is typically served as a [Christmas](#) drink or during New Year's eve. Historically, however, it is a winter beverage, not a holiday-specific one. Although eggnog can be produced from "homemade" recipes, ready-made eggnog containing alcohol and "just-add-alcohol" versions are available for purchase in a variety of stores. Whisky, rum, brandy, or cognac can be added to eggnog. Since the 1960s, eggnog has been served cold and without alcohol, both of which are significant departures from its historical origins. In North America, a few soymilk manufacturers offer seasonally-available, soy-based alternatives for vegans and those with dairy or milk allergies. Eggnog also can be added as a flavouring to food or other drinks.

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## Folar



The priest asking for Folar

The **Folar** is traditionally the bread of Passover in Portugal, an ancestral food made of the ritual and alchemist mixture of the water, salt, eggs and flour of wheat. The form, the content and the secret of the confection varies as the regions of Portugal and goes since the salty one to the sweet, in the most diverse forms.

The tradition of folar has as base all a ritual of allotment, solidarity and brotherhood, with a strong symbolic and religious meaning.

It is also the offering to the godsons for the godfathers and of the fiduciary offices to the priest for the time of [Easter](#). A very strong linking between this act and the bread that Jesus distributed with the disciples in the last supper. In some prescriptions it comes with an boiled egg with rind, that symbolically represent the renaissance and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Particularly the north-eastern of Portugal in Chaves or Valpaços folar is made stuffed with meat of pig, ham, salpicão and linguiça.

A true link of union between the Land and the the Holy for the symbolic that represents.

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## Fritule

**Fritule** is a festive Croatian pastry resembling little donuts, made particularly for Christmas.

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# Fruitcake

**Fruitcake** is a heavy cake made of dried or candied fruits and nuts that are soaked in brandy or rum, often used in the celebration of weddings and Christmas.

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## History

The earliest recipe from ancient Rome lists pomegranate seeds, pine nuts, and raisins that were mixed into barley mash.

In the Middle Ages, honey, spices, and preserved fruits were added and the name fruitcake was first used. Robert Sietsema finds that inexpensive sugar from the American Colonies and the discovery that high concentrations of sugar could preserve fruits created an excess of candied fruit. The fruitcake was the way to use them.

In the 18th century, Europeans were baking fruitcakes using nuts from the harvest for good luck in the following year. The cake was saved and eaten before the next harvest. Fruitcakes proliferated until a law in Europe restricted them to Christmas, weddings, and a few other holidays. Even so, the fruitcake remained popular at Victorian Teas in England throughout the 19th century.

Mail-order fruitcakes began in 1913. The management of Ringling Brothers Circus liked the fruitcake from Collin Street Bakery, a local bakery in Corsicana, Texas. They ordered them as gifts to be mailed to friends around the country. Collin Street Bakery, using the old European recipe of baker Gus Weidmann and salesman Tom McElwee, grew quickly, and have shipped their fruitcakes to nearly 200 countries worldwide and numerous multi-national corporations and famous individuals.

The modern fruitcakes are fundamentally butter cakes with just enough dough to bind the fruit. The cakes are saturated with liqueurs or brandy, and covered in powdered sugar, both of which prevent mold. Brandy or wine-soaked linens are used to store the fruitcakes. Many people feel fruitcakes improve with age. Some cakes have been eaten 25 years after baking.

Recently, in Waukesha, Wisconsin, a man discovered a 43 year old fruitcake in his mother's attic that his aunts had sent to him in 1962, while stationed at an Army base in Alaska. The cake arrived wrapped in brown paper with a red "fragile, handle with care" sticker on it, and the label "Old Fashioned Fruitcake". The man who found this treasure says "Now it's just old".

## Fruitcake in popular culture

In the United States of America, the fruitcake has become one of the most ridiculed desserts and the butt of many jokes centered on its heaviness and long shelf life.

Former *Tonight Show* host Johnny Carson joked that there really is only one fruitcake in the world. It is passed from family to family -- a joke also frequently attributed to the writer Calvin Trillin, who denies being the source. Trillin says he was just passing along a theory he "had heard from someone in Denver". He continues, "There is nothing dangerous about fruitcakes as long as people send them along without eating them." The Fruitcake Lady makes appearances with current host Jay Leno and offers her "fruitcake" opinions.

Comedian Jim Gaffigan has used fruitcake in his bit to question its relation to regular cakes with the line, "Fruit, good; cake, great; fruitcake, nasty crap."

For the last nine years about 500 people have shown up in Manitou Springs, Colorado each January for the Great Fruitcake Toss. "We encourage the use of recycled fruitcakes", says Leslie Lewis of the Manitou Springs Chamber of Commerce. The all-time Great Fruitcake Toss record is 420 feet.

In the UK, fruitcakes are far moister and richer than their American counterparts, and remain extremely popular. The traditional Christmas cake is a fruitcake covered in marzipan, and then in white satin or royal icing. They are often further decorated with snow scenes, holly leaves and berries (real or artificial), or tiny decorative robins or snowmen.

Fruitcakes have been [banned on airplanes](#). Because they are difficult to identify using x-ray equipment at security checkpoints, they could exacerbate security delays created by recently increased security.

*Fruitcake* is also used, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, as insulting slang for a 'crazy person' (e.g. "he's a complete fruitcake"). It is derived from the expression "nutty as a fruitcake", which was first recorded in 1935. It is also used to suggest that someone is a homosexual.

## See also

- [Christmas cake](#)
- [Christmas pudding](#)

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## Ganzeltopf

**Ganzeltopf** is a traditional French dish, popular at Christmas, prepared like a conserve and simmered in the oven with winter vegetables and a bottle of Sylvaner.

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## Gingerbread



A gingerbread display

**Gingerbread** is a sweet that can take the form of a cake or a cookie in which the predominant flavor is ginger.

As a cookie, gingerbread can be made into a thin, crisp cookie (often called a ginger snap) or a softer cookie similar to the German [Lebkuchen](#). Gingerbread cookies are often cut into shapes, particularly gingerbread men.

A variant dough is used to make **gingerbread houses** à la the "witch's house" encountered by Hansel and Gretel. These, covered with a variety of candies and icing, are a common [Christmas](#) decoration.

Another variant uses a boiled dough that can be molded like clay to form inedible statuettes or other decorations. A significant form of popular art in Europe, major centers of gingerbread mould carving included Lyon, Nürnberg, Pest, Prague, Pardubice, Ulm, and Toruń (ger.: *Thorner Kathrinchen*). Gingerbread moulds often displayed the "news", showing carved portraits of new kings, emperors, and queens, for example. Substantial mould collections are held at the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń, Poland and the Bread Museum in Ulm, Germany.

The cake form tends to be a dense, treaclely (molasses-based) spice cake. Some recipes add mustard, pepper, raisins, nuts, and/or other spices/ingredients to the batter. In the U.S. state of Vermont gingerbread cake rarely includes raisins or nuts. The Vermont style of cake is flavored with powdered ginger and ground black pepper for intensity. Rather than being iced or frosted, the cake is served with warm lemon sauce. Until recent years it was a common Vermont 4th of July dessert, but today is more often served in the winter, particularly at Christmastime.

Originally, the term *gingerbread* (from Latin *zingiber* via Old French *gingebras*) referred to preserved ginger, then to a confection made with honey and spices.

*Gingerbread* is often translated into French as *pain d'épices*. *Pain d'épices* is a French pastry also made with honey and spices, but not crispy.

**Gingerbread** is also an architectural term for highly decorated Victorian houses.

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## Glogg

**Glogg** (Swedish: *Glögg*, Norwegian: *Gløgg*, Danish: *Gløg*, Finnish: *Glögi*) is the Scandinavian version of vin chaud [or mulled wine](#). The main ingredients are (usually red) wine, spices such as cinnamon and cloves, and optionally also stronger spirits such as vodka, akvavit or even cognac. The mixture is prepared by heating, but it is not allowed to boil in order for the alcohol not to evaporate. Glögg is generally served with raisins and almonds, and is a popular warm drink during the [Christmas](#) season.

In Denmark gløgg is traditionally served during the Christmas season with æbleskiver (apple dumplings) sprinkled with powdered sugar and accompanied with strawberry marmalade.

Glogg recipes vary widely, and variations with sweet wines such as Madeira or spirits such as Cognac, Armagnac or Brandy are also very popular. Glogg can also be made alcohol-free by using juices (usually blackcurrant) or by boiling the Glogg for a few minutes to evaporate the alcohol.

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## Hallaca

In Venezuelan cuisine, an **hallaca** (alt. spelling, "hayaca") is a mixture of beef, pork, capers, raisins, and olives wrapped in maize (cornmeal dough) bound within plantain leaves with string and steamed afterwards. It is typically served during the [Christmas](#) holiday. Hallacas are also known in the eastern part of Colombia with a similar recipe.

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### Origins

A little bit European, a little bit indigenous, and a little bit African, the unique and tasty hallaca is said to have its origins in the plantation days of colonial Venezuela when there was still slave ownership. Popular myth has it that it was common practice for the plantation owners to donate leftover Christmas food scraps such as bits of pork and beef to their slaves, who would wrap them in cornmeal and plantain leaves for subsequent preparation and cooking. A more likely history of the origins of this food, however, may point to ancestors from abroad.

An alternate theory of its origins denotes the similarity of the hallaca to the Spanish *empanada gallega* (Galician pastry), emphasizing the fact that the filling of the hallaca is almost identical — with the substitution of the plain flour with maize, and the plantain leaf for the expensive iron casts not readily available to the new world at the time. However, the most likely ancestor of the maize body and plantain envelope of the hallaca is the tamale. In fact, some people from western Venezuela (primarily in Zulia, Falcón and Lara states) use the terms "tamar" and "tamare" to refer to what is basically a **bollo** — the closest version of the tamale in Venezuela — with a simple meat filling.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Tradition

The hallaca is the staple Venezuelan Christmas dinner dish and its preparation is practically limited to that time of the year. It is still prepared in a similar fashion to colonial times with some modern refinements. The hallaca is also considered one of the most representative icons of Venezuelan multicultural heritage, as its preparation includes European ingredients (such as raisins, nuts and olives), indigenous ingredients (corn meal colored with annatto seeds), and African ingredients (smoked banana or plantain leaves used for wrapping).

## Preparation

The traditional hallaca is made by extending a plantain leaf, greasing it with a spoonful of annatto-colored cooking oil and spreading on it a round portion of corn dough (roughly 30 cm), which is then sprinkled with pieces of stewed meat (pork, poultry, beef, lard, crisp or pork rind), raisins, nuts, pepper filled olives and occasionally boiled eggs. Then it is skillfully wrapped in an oblong fashion and tied with string in a typical square mesh before its cooking in boiling water. Afterwards, it is picked from the pail with a fork, unwrapped and served on its own plantain leaves with chicken salad, *pan de jamón* (ham filled bread) or plain bread.

After making a number of hallacas, the remaining portion of ingredients is occasionally mixed together in order to obtain a uniform dough. The dough undergoes the same hallaca wrap and cooking preparation, although typically smaller in size and much fewer in number. The result is the bollo, which may be offered as a lighter option to the hallaca at lunch or dinner.

After cooking, hallacas can be frozen for several weeks with no changes in flavor. It is common for families to eat hallacas as late as early February.

## Culture

Hallacas require many laborious hours of preparation and are made in large quantities (varying from a few dozen to several hundred). It is a job joyfully done by whole families, which engage in its preparation as a celebration and also as a reason for reuniting family members at Christmas time. The hallaca making party is matriarchal, having grandmothers and/or mothers in the lead roles. Traditional music and drinks contribute up the festive atmosphere, and images of mothers nagging children as they steal bits of fillings from the table and of men complaining of being left to clean leaves and to do last minute shoppings are typical during the party.

It is customary between families, neighbors and friends to share several hallacas as a way to evaluate the skills of the other party in their making. Another tradition is to offer them to any visitor.

## Notes

1. [Rosenblat, Ángel](#). (Venezuela Analysis, ???). "[Hallaca](#)". Retrieved 09 Jan 2005.

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## Joulupöytä

**Joulupöytä** (translated "Christmas table") is the name of the traditional food board served at [Christmas](#) in Finland. It contains many different dishes, most of them typical for the season. The main dish is usually a large Christmas ham, which is eaten with mustard or bread along with the other dishes. Fish is also served (often [lutefisk](#) and gravlax), and with the ham there are also so-called "laatikot", casseroles with liver and raisins or potatoes or rice and carrots. The traditional Christmas beverage is either alcoholic or non-alcoholic mulled wine ("glögi" in Finnish).

The traditional dishes of joulupöytä contain:

- Ham
- Boiled potatoes
- Lutefisk and white sauce
- Gravlax
- Liver and raisin casserole
- Potato casserole
- Carrot casserole
- Turnip casserole
- Rosolli (salad from boiled beetroots, carrots, potatoes and cucumber. If served with herring, it becomes sillisalaatti)
- Liver pudding
- Various sashimi, usually from salmon, whitefish and pikeperch
- Pickled herring in various forms (tomato, mustard, matjes or onion sauces)

Mustard

Various sauces

Beverages most often served are:

- Akvavit as appetizer
- [Mulled wine](#)
- Beer, usually special Christmas brands. Most Finnish breweries have seasonal beers for Christmas.
- Milk
- Wine is uncommon, but not rare

The usual desserts are:

- Plum soup
- Rice porridge
- Ice cream with jam
- Confectioneries and other sweets, especially chocolate

Usually the rice porridge is served from a large, common kettle and an almond has been hidden in it. The one who gets the almond gets his or her Christmas presents first.

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## Julmust

**Julmust** is a soft drink that is consumed mainly in Sweden at [Christmas](#). For the rest of the year it is found under the name *must*. At [Easter](#) the name is *påskmust*. (*jul*=Christmas, *påsk*=Easter). The content is the same regardless of the marketing name although the time it is stored before bottling differs; however, the beverage is more closely associated with Christmas and somewhat less with Easter. It is often hard to find the drink in off-season. 45 million litres of julmust are consumed during December (to be compared with roughly 9 million Swedes), which is around 50% of the total softdrink volume in December and 3/4s of the total yearly must sales.

Must was created by Harry Roberts and his father Robert Roberts in 1910 as a non-alcoholic alternative to beer. The syrup is still made exclusively by Roberts AB in Örebro. The original recipe is said to be locked up in a safe with only one person knowing the full recipe.

Must is made of carbonated water, sugar, hops extract, malt extract, spices, colouring (E150), citric acid, and preservatives. The hops and malt extracts give the must a somewhat beer-like taste, but must is not fermented and contains no alcohol. Must can be aged provided it is stored in a glass bottle. Some people buy must in December only to store it a year before drinking it.

Julmust might be the source of some annoyance for Coca-Cola in Sweden, since Sweden is the only country where the consumption of Coca-Cola drops during Christmas. Many Swedes drink julmust instead. This was quoted as one of the main reasons Coca-Cola broke away from their contract with Pripps and started Coca-Cola Drycker Sverige AB instead. Coca-Cola now produces its own julmust, albeit very anonymous and never advertised until 2004, when Coca-Cola started marketing their julmust under the brand "Bjäre julmust".

Those outside Sweden who are curious to try Julmust might be able to purchase and sample a bottle from a nearby IKEA. However, it should be noted that availability is not guaranteed; one is most likely to find it in stock early in the month of December. However, according to IKEA Public Relations, as of March 2006 Julmust will be available at all outlets in the USA throughout the entire year. This remains to be verified.

In November of 2004 Pepsi marketed a product similar in idea and somewhat in taste to Julmust to the United States called Pepsi Holiday Spice. It was only on sale during the 2004-2005 holiday season.

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## Kalach

**Kalach** (Russian: :0;0G; Ukrainian: :>;0G), also known as **kolach** or **kolocho**), is a traditional Slavic bread used at various ritual meals.

### Ukrainian tradition

Ukrainian *kolachi* (plural) is traditionally made by braiding dough made with wheat flour into ring-shaped or oblong forms.

It is a symbol of of luck, prosperity, and good bounty. It is traditionally prepared for [Svyat Vechir](#) (*Holy Supper*), the traditional Ukrainian [Christmas Eve](#) ritual, most often 3 round breads stacked one atop the other with a candle in the middle.

Kolaches are also featured at memorial services.

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## Knack

**Knäck** is a traditional Swedish toffee prepared at [Christmas](#).

### Recipe

A common recipe is equal parts (typically 0.3 litres) of whipping cream (not whipped), sugar and pale syrup. It is also common to add some butter (a few tablespoons). One can also add one or two teaspoons of vanilla sugar or about 0.1 kg of peeled and finely chopped almonds. Put all the ingredients except for the almonds in a heavy based saucepan and stir until the sugar has melted. Let it boil for a while. The mix can be tested by spooning a few drops of it into a glass of water. It should be chewy, but not too hard. Then add the almonds and pour the mixture in waxed paper cones and leave to cool.

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## Kutia



Kutia in a ceramic *makitra*, with a wooden *makohon* beside it

**Kutia** ([help·info](#)) is a sweet grain pudding, traditionally served in Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian cultures. Kutia is often the first dish in the traditional [twelve-dish Christmas Eve supper](#). It is rarely served at other times of the year.

It resembles koliva from Serbia or Romania (used usually for funerals), but the latter is mixed only with walnuts, sugar and raisins.

Kutia was also part of a common Eastern Orthodox tradition in the Russian Empire, which has become virtually extinct in Russia as a result of the official atheism of the former Soviet Union.

Traditionally it was made of wheat, poppy seeds, honey (or sugar), various nuts and sometimes raisins. In many recipes milk or cream was also used.

Nowadays other ingredients (which were unavailable or just too expensive in earlier centuries) like almonds and pieces of oranges are added. On the other hand, the wheat grain, that is now relatively rarely available in the food stores in an unprocessed form, is sometimes replaced with barley or other similar grains.

### General recipe

Take 0.5 kg each of wheat and poppy seeds, or slightly more wheat.

The wheat grains should be simmered in hot water on low heat for 3-4 hours.

The poppy seeds should be simmered in hot water until they can be crushed between the fingertips. Then they should be ground three times in a food processor or a meat grinder. Traditionally, the poppy seeds were crushed in a mortar and pestle made specifically for this purpose (*makitra* and *makohon*, respectively).

Strain out the water from the poppy seeds and from the wheat and allow them to cool.

Mix the cooled poppy seeds and wheat, then add some liquid honey (you may need to add a little hot water to dissolve it) or dissolved sugar (0.1-0.2 kg by our sample measures) and some or all of: nuts, raisins, almonds, pieces of oranges (amount of these extra ingredients vary a lot between recipes, suggested is 0.3-0.5 kg total).

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## Lebkuchen

**Lebkuchen** are traditional German [Christmas](#) cookies similar to [gingerbread](#), which were probably invented by Medieval monks in Franconia, Germany in the 13th century. Lebkuchen bakers were recorded as early as 1296 in Ulm, and 1395 in Nuremberg, the latter being the most famous Lebkuchen exporter today.



A Lebkuchenherz (note: The icing words "Du ekelst mich an" mean "You disgust me", probably a joke, since Lebkuchen usually come with a nice message such as "I love you")

Sometimes Lebkuchen are packaged in richly decorated nostalgic tins and boxes which have become collectors' items. Lebkuchen range in taste from spicy to sweet and come in a variety of shapes with round being the most common. The ingredients usually include honey, spices and nuts, almonds or candied fruit. Salt of Hartshorn and Potash are often used for raising the dough. The Lebkuchen dough is often placed on a thin wafer base called Oblate. This was an idea of the monks who used communion wafers to prevent the dough from sticking.

The forerunner of today's Lebkuchen was called 'honey cake' and its history can be traced back to the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans. They believed that honey, the only widely

available very sweet food, was a gift of the gods and had magical and healing powers. Honey cakes were also worn as a talisman in battle or as protection against evil spirits. Teutonic peoples used honey cakes for the same purpose, especially around the winter solstice, which might be the reason Lebkuchen became associated with Christmas.

Since 1808, Nuremberg gingerbread of the best quality is called *Elisenlebkuchen*. It is uncertain whether the name *Elise* refers to the daughter of a gingerbread baker or the wife of a margrave. Since 1996, *Nürnberger Lebkuchen* is a Protected Designation of Origin.

Lebkuchen are usually soft, but a very hard and generally inedible type of Lebkuchen is used to produce Lebkuchen hearts, usually inscribed with icing, which are available at many German fairs and the *witch houses* made popular by Hansel and Gretel. The closest German equivalent of the gingerbread man is the *Honigkuchenpferd* (*honey cake horse*).

The etymology of the term Lebkuchen is uncertain, but derivations from the Latin *libum* (flat bread) and from the Germanic word *Laib* (loaf) have been proposed. Another likely possibility is that it comes from the old term *Leb-Honig*, the rather solid crystallized honey taken from the hive, that can not be used for much besides baking. Folk etymology often associates it with *Leben* (*life*), and many people in Germany seem to think that eating it is a good cure for winter depression.

Historically, Lebkuchen was also known as *honey cake* (*Honigkuchen*) and *pepper cake* (*Pfefferkuchen*).

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## Lefse

**Lefse** is a traditional soft Scandinavian flatbread made out of potato, milk or cream and flour, and cooked on a griddle. Special tools are available for lefse baking, including long wooden turning sticks and special rolling pins with deep grooves. There are significant regional variations in the way lefse is made and eaten, but it generally resembles a tortilla. In some parts of the United States (such as Minnesota), lefse is available in grocery stores, just like tortillas; one Minnesota tortilla factory makes a run of lefse once a month on its tortilla equipment.

In central Norway, a variation called **tynnlefse** (thin lefse) is made, which is rolled up with butter, sugar and cinnamon (or with butter and brown sugar), and eaten as a cake.

**Tjukklefse** or **tykklefse** (thick lefse) is thicker, and often served with coffee as a cake.

**Potetlefse** (potato lefse) is often used in place of a hot-dog bun and can be used to roll up sausages. This delight is also known as *pølse med lompe* in Norway, *lompe* being the potato lefse.

There are many ways of spicing lefse up. The most common is adding butter and sugar to the lefse and rolling it up. Other tasty ways to eat it include adding cinnamon and spreading jelly upon it. Scandinavian-American variations include rolling it with a thin layer of peanut butter and sugar, with butter and sugar, with butter and corn syrup, or with ham and eggs. Also quite good with beef, and other savory items, it is comparable to a thin tortilla.

Many Scandinavian-Americans eat lefse primarily around [Christmas](#), along with other Scandinavian delights such as [lutefisk](#).

The town of Starbuck, MN, is the home of the world's largest lefse.

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## Lutefisk



Lutefisk (on the upper left side of the plate) as served in a Norwegian restaurant, with potatoes, mashed peas, and bacon.

**Lutefisk (lutfisk)** (pronounced /lʊˈtʃɪsk/ in Norway, Minnesota, /lʊˈtʃɪsk/ in Sweden and the Swedish-speaking areas in Finland) is a traditional food of the Nordic countries made from stockfish (air-dried whitefish) and lye (lut). In Sweden, this food is called lutfisk, omitting the medial 'e'. In Finland the same dish is known as lipeäkala. The direct translation is lye fish, owing to the fact it is made with caustic soda or potash lye.

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## General

### Preparation

Lutefisk is made from air-dried whitefish (normally cod, but ling is also used), prepared with lye, in a sequence of particular treatments. The first treatment is to soak the stockfish in cold water for five to six days (changed daily). The saturated stockfish is then soaked in an unchanged solution of cold water and lye for an additional two days. The fish will swell during this soaking, regaining a size even bigger than the original (undried) fish, but the protein content paradoxically decreases by more than 50 percent, causing its famous jelly-like consistency. When this treatment is finished, the fish (saturated with lye) has a pH value of 11–12, and is therefore caustic. To make the fish edible, a final treatment of yet another four to six days (and nights) of soaking in cold water (also changed daily) is needed. Eventually, the lutefisk is ready to be cooked.

In Finland, the traditional reagent used is birch ash. It contains high amount of potassium carbonate and hydrocarbonate, giving the fish more mellow treatment than sodium hydroxide (lyestone). It is important not to incubate the fish too long in the lye, because saponification of the fish fats may occur, effectively rendering the fish fats into soap. The term for such spoiled fish in Finnish is *saippuakala* (soap fish).

### Cooking

After the preparation, the lutefisk is saturated with water and must therefore be cooked carefully so it does not fall into pieces. It does not need any additional water for the cooking; it is enough to place it in a pan, salt it, seal the lid tightly, and let it steam cook under a very low heat for 20–25 minutes. It is also possible to do this in the oven. The fish is then put in an ovenproof dish, covered with aluminium foil, and baked at 225 °C (435 °F) for 40–50 minutes.

When cooking and eating lutefisk, it is important to clean the lutefisk off of pans, plates, and utensils right away. Lutefisk left overnight becomes nearly impossible to remove.

## Eating

In the Nordic Countries, the "season" for lutefisk starts early in November and is typically served throughout [Christmas](#). Lutefisk is also very popular in Nordic-American areas of the United States, particularly in the Upper Midwest.

Lutefisk is usually served with a variety of side dishes, including, but not limited to, bacon, green pea stew, potatoes, meatballs, gravy, mashed rutabaga, white sauce, syrup, geitost (goat cheese), or "old" cheese (gammelost). Especially in the U.S., it is usually eaten with [lefse](#). Even if the common denominator is lutefisk, side dishes vary greatly from family to family and region to region, and is a theme of recurring controversy when different "traditions" of lutefisk-eaters meet and eat together.

Nowadays, akvavit and beer often accompany the meal due to its use at festive and ceremonial occasions (and most eaters, regardless of side dish preferences, will argue that these beverages complement the meal perfectly). This is a recent invention however; due to its preservative qualities, lutefisk has traditionally been a common "every day" meal in wintertime.

The dish has sometimes subjected Nordic-Americans to jokes about the personality traits suggested by serving chemically-treated white fish with a white sauce. Lutefisk prepared from cod is somewhat notorious, even within Scandinavia, for its intense odor. Conversely, lutefisk prepared from pollock or haddock has almost no odor. But lutefisk has its fair share of devotees: during 2001 Norwegians alone ate a total of 2,055 tonnes of lutefisk in their homes and approximately 560 tonnes in restaurants.

The taste of well prepared lutefisk is extremely mild and mellow, and often the white sauce is spiced with pepper or other strong tasting spices to bring out the taste.

## Origin

### Inception

The issue of how lutefisk first was created is as controversial as the fish itself. Some stories tell about fish accidentally dropped in a washing bowl containing lye, and because of poverty the fish had to be eaten nevertheless. Yet other stories tell about fires of various kinds, because ashes of wood combined with water will create lye. A possible scenario is that drying racks for stockfish caught fire, followed by days of rain, and again, because of poverty, the fish still had to be picked from the ashes, cleaned, prepared and eaten. It is quite possible the softening with lye, which is actually a fairly common practice with many kinds of food, was deliberate rather than accidental.

### Traces in literature

When people first started eating lutefisk is controversial. Some enthusiasts claim the tradition goes back to the age of Vikings, other and contrasting views claim that the meal has 16th century Dutch origins. Despite this, it is somewhat commonly agreed that the first written mention of the phenomenon "lutefisk" traces back to a letter from Swedish king

Gustav I in 1540, and the first written description of the preparation process is in Swedish archbishop Olaus Magnus's (1490–1557) personal writings from 1555. When it comes to Norwegian traces, author Henry Notaker (in the encyclopedia "Apetittleksikon") claims that the first written traces in Norway dates to the south-eastern parts of Norway in the late 18th century. Additionally, a classic Norwegian cookbook ("Hanna Winsnes") from 1845 tells about how to make lye for lutefisk from a combination of birch ash, limestone, and water.

A folk tale about the origin of lutefisk says when the Vikings were pillaging Ireland, St. Patrick sent men to pour lye on the store of dried fish on the longships with the hope of poisoning the Vikings and thereby ridding Ireland of these intruders. However, rather than dying of poisoning or starvation, the Vikings declared lutefisk a delicacy. Some Scandinavian descendants claim their strength and longevity are derived from eating lutefisk at least once a year.

### **Misconception of Norwegians and lutefisk**

A misconception originating in the United States is that most Norwegians eat and enjoy lutefisk. In real life lutefisk is more common in the Norwegian-American community than it is among actual modern day Norwegians. For example both Glenwood, Minnesota and Madison, Minnesota claim to be the "lutefisk capital of the world." A survey<sup>[1]</sup> performed by the National Information Office for Meat in Norway claimed that as few as only 2 percent of Norwegians have lutefisk on Christmas Eve (compared to 52 percent who eat rib roast, the most popular Christmas dinner in Norway), while 20 percent eat lutefisk before Christmas.

### **Lutefisk humor**

Lutefisk eaters thrive on quotes and jokes from skeptics of lutefisk comparing it to everything from rat poison (which has a hint of truth to it, because of the traces of unnatural amino acid lysinoalanine found in lutefisk due to the reaction with lye) to weapons of mass destruction. A few examples are:

- Quote from Garrison Keillor's book *Lake Wobegon Days*:

*"Every Advent we entered the purgatory of lutefisk, a repulsive gelatinous fishlike dish that tasted of soap and gave off an odor that would gag a goat. We did this in honor of Norwegian ancestors, much as if survivors of a famine might celebrate their deliverance by feasting on elm bark. I always felt the cold creeps as Advent approached, knowing that this dread delicacy would be put before me and I'd be told, 'Just have a little.' Eating a little was like vomiting a little, just as bad as a lot."*

- Interview with Jeffrey Steingarten, author of *The Man Who Ate Everything* (translated quote from a 1999 article in Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet:)

*"Lutefisk is not food, it is a weapon of mass destruction. It is currently the only exception for the man who ate everything. Otherwise, I am fairly liberal, I gladly eat worms and insects, but I draw the line on lutefisk."*

*"What is special with lutefisk?"*

*"Lutefisk is the Norwegians' attempt at conquering the world. When they discovered that Viking raids didn't give world supremacy, they invented a meal so terrifying, so cruel, that they could scare people to become one's subordinates. And if I'm not terribly wrong, you will*



*be able to do it as well."*

*"But some people say that they like lutefisk. Do you think they tell the truth?"*

*"I do not know. Of all food, lutefisk is the only one that I don't take any stand on. I simply cannot decide whether it is nice or disgusting, if the taste is interesting or commonplace. The only thing I know, is that I like bacon, mustard and lefse. Lutefisk is an example of food that almost doesn't taste anything, but is so full of emotions that the taste buds get knocked out."*

## Other

The rocks studied by rovers on the planet Mars are often given funny names. One that the Spirit rover examined for several days was called Lutefisk.

In the popular video game Psychonauts, one of the characters is named Nils Lutefisk, Nils being a common Norwegian name.

In the episode of King of the Hill titled "Revenge Of The Lutefisk," the new reverend at the Hills' church, a native of Minnesota, brings a dish of lutefisk to a church potluck. Though the other guests are wary of, even repulsed by the lutefisk, Bobby Hill tastes it and finds it so irresistible that he takes the whole dish of lutefisk with him under the buffet table and eats it all. After it works its way through him in the church bathroom the next day, he uses a match to cover the smell and accidentally lights the church on fire.

The 1999 film Drop Dead Gorgeous, set in the Midwest, makes a reference to lutefisk. One character mentions it's best with "lots of butter."

An open-source de novo sequencing package for mass spectrometry data.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Spellings

- Norwegian: *lutefisk* (earlier *ludfisk* (Danish) spelling still sometimes used in English)
- Swedish: *lutfisk*
- Finnish: *lipeäkala*

## Notes

1. <sup>^</sup> [Lutefisk software](#) accessed 2006-08-08

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## Marzipan

**Marzipan** is a confection consisting primarily of ground almonds and sugar that derives its characteristic flavor from bitter almonds, which constitute 4% to 6% of total almond content by weight. Some marzipan is also flavored with rosewater.

Marzipan is often made into sweets: common uses are marzipan-filled chocolate and small marzipan imitations of fruits and vegetables. It is also rolled into thin sheets and glazed for icing cakes and is traditionally used in wedding cakes, [Christmas cakes](#), and [stollen](#). In



some countries marzipan is shaped into small figures of animals, such as pigs, as a traditional treat for New Year's Day. Marzipan is also used in Tortell, and in some versions of king cake eaten during the Carnival season.

In Italy, particularly in Palermo, marzipan (marzapane) is often shaped and painted with food colorings to resemble fruit — Frutta martorana — especially during the Christmas season. In Portugal, traditional marzipan (*maçapão*) fruit shaped sweets made in the Algarve region are called *morgadinhos*.

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## Recipe

While there are various subtly different ways of making marzipan, below is a typical recipe:

### Ingredients:

16oz Ground Almonds  
8oz Icing Sugar  
8oz Castor Sugar  
2 Eggs  
1 tablespoon of Lemon Juice  
1 teaspoon of Almond Essence

### What to do:

- 1) Whisk the eggs, almond essence and lemon juice in a bowl.
- 2) Stir in the sugars and ground almonds.
- 3) Use your hands to mould the mixture into a ball.
- 4) Knead well to produce a pliable dough.
- 5) Wrap in grease-proof paper and refrigerate until needed.

## History

Although it is believed to have originated in Persia (present-day Iran) and to have been introduced to Europe through the Turks, there is some dispute between Hungary and Italy over its origin. Marzipan became a specialty of the Baltic Sea region of Germany. In particular, the city of Lübeck has a proud tradition of marzipan manufacture (Lübecker Marzipan). The city's manufacturers like Niederegger still guarantee their Marzipan to contain two thirds almonds by weight, which results in a juicy, bright yellow product.

Historically, the city of Königsberg in East Prussia was renowned for its Marzipan production. Today, the term *Königsberger Marzipan* refers to a special type of Marzipan in Germany.

Under EU law, marzipan must have a minimum almond oil content of 14% and a maximum moisture content of 8.5%. Optional additional ingredients are rosewater, honey, pistachios and preservatives. In the U.S., marzipan must include at least a quarter almonds by weight, otherwise it is considered to be almond paste. However, in Sweden and Finland "almond paste" refers to a marzipan that contains 50% ground almonds, i.e. a much higher quality than regular marzipan.

## Etymology

The German name has largely ousted the original English name **marchpane** with the same apparent derivation: "March bread." *Marzapane* is documented earlier in Italian than in any other language, and the sense "bread" for *pan* is Romance. However, the ultimate etymology is unclear; for example, the Italian word derives from a Middle Latin word meaning "small box" and originally having the meaning of a coin on which a figure of a seated Christ was imprinted. Among the other possible etymologies set forth in the Oxford English Dictionary, one theory posits that the word "marzipan" may however be a corruption of Martaban, a Burmese city famous for its jars.

## Trivia

In business, the "marzipan layer" refers to the group of managers just below the highest level of directors or partners. This phrase refers to the fact that in some cakes, a layer of marzipan lies just below the icing.

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# Mince pie

A **mince pie** or **mince tart**<sup>u</sup> is a traditional British sweet pastry, usually consumed during the [Christmas](#) and New Year period.

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## Description

These small pies, usually between 2 and 3 inches in diameter (5 - 7.5 centimetres), can be made using either sweet shortcrust pastry or puff pastry. The American version of the mince pie can be large (8-10 inches or 20-25 centimeters) and able to serve many people.

The origin of the word 'mincemeat' is often of interest, especially as it does not appear to contain any meat whatsoever. Up to Victorian times, the mince(meat) pie would have actually have been a spiced meat pie with some dried fruit. It has evolved to the point where the only meat in the pie is in the form of suet, a historical throwback. The filling is nowadays made from fruit mincemeat (fruitmince to North Americans) containing dried fruit such as raisins, currants, cherries, apricot, candied peel; spices such as cinnamon or nutmeg; nuts such as walnuts or chopped almonds; suet; and some kind of alcohol, usually either brandy or rum. Although no longer a meat pie, the mince pie is suitable for vegetarians only if the suet is replaced by vegetable fat.

Once cooked, the pie is finished off with a delicate dusting of either caster sugar or icing sugar on top.

## History

The origins of the mince pie begins with the medieval pastry, **chewette** which was either fried or baked. The "chewette" actually contained liver or chopped meat mixed with boiled eggs and ginger. Dried fruit and sweet ingredients would be added to the chewette's filling for variety. By the 16th century 'mince' or **shred** pie was considered a [Christmas](#) specialty. In the mid-17th century the liver and chopped meat was replaced by suet and meat products were no longer generally used in the 'mince' by the 19th century in both North America and Great Britain though traditional suet pies are still made it is no longer the dominant form. (Davidson, 1999)

## Folklore and Traditions

Folklore states that mince pies are a favourite food of Father Christmas, and that one or two should be left on a plate at the foot of the chimney (along with a small glass of brandy or sherry, and a carrot for the reindeer) as a thank-you for stockings well-filled.

English tradition demands that the mince meat mixture should only be stirred in a clockwise direction. To stir it anticlockwise is to bring bad luck for the coming year.

Tradition also says that one should make a wish whilst eating one's first mince pie of the festive season, and that mince pies should always be eaten in silence.

Eating at least one mince pie on each of the twelve days of Christmas is thought by some people to bring luck for the coming year.

Mince pies should traditionally have a star on top, to represent the Christmas Star which led the shepherds and Magi to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

## Variations

Other variations include the mincemeat tart, similar in form and taste, save for the lack of a pastry top, as is the case for all kinds of tart. In the United States, mince pies are often classified as mincemeat tarts, although this usage would be considered erroneous by most Britons.

Mincemeat turnovers (a kind of sweet pastry similar to a Cornish pasty) are often made with leftover pastry and mincemeat, and can be consumed with custard, cream or ice-cream.

A Flies graveyard is the name given in Northern Ireland to a flatter variation also known as a currant square.

## Trivia

- *Mince pies* is also cockney rhyming slang for 'eyes' (usually shortened to 'minces' or 'mincers').
- In New Zealand mince pies have meat in them, and sometimes they have cheese in them as well.
- The Guinness World Record holder for the fastest eating of three mince pies, 2.5" in diameter and commercially available, is Barry Donovan of Suffolk, UK, and stands at 1 minute 23 seconds as of February 13th, 2006.

## References

- Davidson, Alan. Oxford Companion to Food (1999). "Mince Pie", p. 507 ISBN 0-19-211579-0

## Notes

1. <sup>^</sup> Although not *strictly* a tart in that it is not open-topped, it is often called a tart in reference to sweetness.

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# Mincemeat tart

**Mincemeat tarts** (also known as [mince pies](#) in the UK) are a rich pastry generally associated with festive occasions, specifically [Christmas](#) and New Year's Eve. Originally, mince pies contained mincemeat: a mixture of meat, suet, dried fruit and spices, often with brandy, but today they usually omit the meat and are made with fruitmince.

Tarts or pies usually still contain suet, also vegetarian versions are also commercially available.

A British tradition associated with mincemeat tarts says that eating one a day on each of the twelve days of Christmas will ensure a happy following year and that one should be left for [Father Christmas](#) as thanks for his delivery of gifts.

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## Mulled wine

**Mulled wine**, similar to the German **Glühwein**, the French **vin chaud**, the Italian **vin brulè**, the Slovak **Verené vino**, is wine, usually red wine, combined with spices and is usually served hot. In the old times wine often went bad, but by adding spices and honey it could be made drinkable again. Nowadays it is a traditional drink during winter, and especially around [Christmas](#), to warm up. In Italy, this beverage is typically drunk in the northern, more Germanic part of the country.

In the United Kingdom, **Mulled wine** is generally made to a different (sweeter) recipe than the German **Glühwein**. Sometimes **Glühwein** (or **Gluehwein**) is offered as an alternative to **Mulled wine** in the United Kingdom.

**Glogg** (Swedish: *Glögg*, Norwegian: *Gløgg*, Danish: *Gløgg*, Finnish: *Glögi*) is the Scandinavian form of mulled wine, similar to Glühwein in German-speaking countries. Glühwein is usually prepared from (not too expensive, sometimes outright cheap) red wine, which is heated and spiced with cinnamon sticks, cloves and sugar. In Romania it is called *vin fiert*, literally meaning hot wine, and comes in both white wines and red wines.

If orange juice is added, it becomes a form of punch.

### See also

- [Glogg](#)

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## Oplatek

**OpBatek** (plural : opBatki)(lithuanian:paplotlis) is an Eastern European [Christmas tradition](#) celebrated in Polish, Slovak and Lithuanian families during Wigilia (*Christmas Eve Vigil*). Family members and friends break off a small piece of the large, thin, rectangular *opBatek* wafer and give it to one another along with a blessing. The unleavened wafers are baked from pure wheat flour and water and often embossed with religious images.

A sample blessing can take the form of "I wish you much health, happiness and the Lord's bountiful blessings as well as the fulfillment of all your plans and everything you wish for yourself." or just wishing good grades to a child and good health to your parents. Despite its simplicity, the custom has made its way into countless households which find its rich symbolism an adaptable annual custom of profound meaning.

The tradition traces its origins to the times of early Christianity and sharing of consecrated bread (Host). As a Christmas custom, "opBatek" originated in Poland and was widely spread as far back as the 17th century. It was the part of szlachta's (Polish nobility) culture and the custom has spread throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and

neighboring countries. In the 19th century in the aftermath of the partitions of Poland it gained patriotic subtexts as the common wish during sharing of “opBatek” became the wish for Poland's regaining its independence. Since that time “opBatek's” are often embossed with religious images. In the 20th century “opBatek” custom went beyond families and gained another meaning: the meeting of present or past coworkers or students.

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## Pandoro

**Pandoro**, as well as its counterpart [Panettone](#), is a traditional Italian sweet yeast bread, most popular around [Christmas](#) and other special occasions, but eaten all year round. Pandoro has a typical is shaped like a frustum with a star section.

It is often served dusted with vanilla scented icing sugar made to resemble the snowy peaks during christmas.

### History



A Homemade Sugared Pandoro

Pandoro appeared in remote times, the product of the ancient art of breadmaking, as the name, Pan d'oro ("golden bread"), suggests. Throughout the Middle Ages, white bread was consumed solely by the rich, while the common people could only afford black bread and, often, not even that. Sweet breads were reserved for nobility. Breads enriched with eggs,

butter and sugar or honey were served in the palaces and were known as "royal bread" or "golden bread".

The desserts consumed in the 17th century were described in the book *Suor Celeste Galilei, Letters to Her Father*, published by La Rosa of Turin, and they included "royal bread" made from flour, sugar, butter and eggs. However, the bread was already known and appreciated in the ancient Rome of Pliny the Elder, in the 1st century. That bread was made with "the finest flour combined with eggs, butter and oil." Virgil and Livy mentioned the preparation under the name Libum.

There are those who see the French brioche as the ancestor of Pandoro and those who regard it as a derivative of the Viennese art of pastrymaking, even if that school is itself of French derivation. However the first citation of a dessert clearly identified as Pandoro dates to the 18th century. The dessert certainly figured in the cuisine of the Venetian aristocracy. Venice was the principal market for spices as late as the 18th century as well as for the sugar that by then had replaced honey in European pastries and breads made from leavened dough. And it was at Verona, in Venetian territory, that the formula for making pandoro was developed and perfected, a process that required a century. The modern history of this dessert bread began at Verona in October 30, 1894, when Domenico Melegatti obtained a patent for a procedure to be applied in producing pandoro industrially.

By 1894, when pandoro entered the annals of Italian confectionery, it had long been a traditional practice at Verona for pastry cooks to go to Vienna to learn their craft. Until a few decades ago, the oldest pastry shops in the historic center of Verona employed Austrian pastry chefs and Veronese bakers would customarily go to Vienna's famous *Sacher* to train.

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## Panettone

**Panettone** (Milanese: *panetùn*) is a typical cake of Milan, Italy, usually prepared and enjoyed for [Christmas](#), and one of the symbols of the town. Maltese nationals are also traditionally associated with this cake.

It has a cupola shape which extends from a cylindrical base and is usually about 12-15 cm high for a 1 kg panettone. Octagonal bases are sometimes seen, as well as the frustum with star section shape more common to pandoro. It is made during a long process which involves the curing of the dough, which is acidic, similar to sourdough. The proofing process alone takes several days, giving the cake its distinctive fluffy characteristics. It contains candied orange and lemon zest, as well as raisins, which are added dry and not soaked. It is served in slices, vertically cut, accompanied with sweet hot beverages or a sweet wine, such as spumante or moscato. In some regions of Italy, it is served with **Crema di Mascarpone**, a cream made from mascarpone cheese, eggs, and typically a sweet liqueur such as Amaretto; if mascarpone cheese is unavailable, zabaglione is sometimes used as a substitute to Crema di Mascarpone.

The most famous producers were Motta, Bauli, Alemagna and Le tre Marie; at the beginning of 20th century, the name Motta was synonymous with panettone.

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## Origins

In Italy, the panettone comes with a rich and often varied history, but one that invariably states that its birthplace is in Milan.

The origins of this cake appear to be ancient, dating back to the Roman Empire, ancient Romans sweetened a type of leavened bread with honey. Throughout the ages this "tall, leavened fruitcake" makes cameo appearances in the arts : In a 16th century painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, also as a recipe in a contemporary recipe book written by Bartolomeo Scappi, personal chef to popes and emperors during the time of Charles V.

The word 'panettone' simply means 'big bread.' In Italian, the suffix '-one' is often used to connote large size. Hence, padre (=father)/padrone (=boss or landlord), calza (= stocking or legging)/calzone (=trousers). According to the same logic, 'panettone' is derived from 'pane' (loaf of bread) or 'pannetto', and adding '-one' yields 'panettone'. The word has given rise to a number of fanciful folk etymologies, however. One 15th century legend from Milan credits the invention to the nobleman falconer Ughetto Atellani. According to legend, he fell in love with Adalgisa, the daughter of a poor baker named Toni. To win her over, the nobleman disguised himself as a baker and invented a rich bread in which he added to the flour and yeast, butter, eggs, dried raisins and candied lemon and orange peel.

The duke of Milan, Ludovico il Moro Sforza (1452-1508), agreed to the marriage, which was held in the presence of Leonardo da Vinci, and encouraged the launch of the new cake-like bread: Pan del Ton (or Toni's bread).

Another legend credits the cake being invented in the court of the Sforzas , but with the following story:

It was Christmas and the court cook had no dessert to offer. So the guests were given a sweet bread baked by a mere kitchen boy, called Toni, which won general praise. Rather than steal the praise for himself, the cook congratulated his assistant and named it after him.

Other historians claim to have found references to "pan del ton" as far back as the 1300s. In those days some families made a thick bread with wheat flour called "pan del ton", which meant "luxury bread" in Milanese dialect.

The first recorded association of Panettone with Christmas can be found in the writings of 18th century illuminist Pietro Verri. He refers to it as 'Pane di Tono' (Large Bread).

## Panettone leaves Italy

In the early 20th century, two enterprising Milanese bakers begin to produce Panettone in large quantities to the rest of Italy. In 1919 Angelo Motta started producing his eponymous brand of cakes. It was also Motta who revolutionised the traditional panettone by giving it its tall domed shape by making the dough rise three times, or almost 20 hours, before cooking, giving it its now-familiar light texture. Motta, now owned by Nestlé, is one of the



best-known brand in Italy to this day. The recipe was adapted shortly after by another baker, Gioacchino Alemagna around 1925, who also gave his name to a popular brand that still exists today. The stiff competition between the two that then ensued led to industrial production of the cake-like bread.

As a result of the fierce competition, by the end of World War II, panettone was cheap enough for anyone and soon became the country's leading Christmas sweet. Northern Italian immigrants to Argentina and Brazil also brought their love of Panettone, and Panettone is enjoyed for Christmas with Hot Cocoa or liquor during the holiday season in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and especially Peru (Known in Peruvian Spanish as 'Panetón'), where the son of immigrants from Casarte, Italy, Antonio D'Onofrio spawned his own brand, using the Alemagna formula, which he licensed, along with the packaging style. This brand is now also owned by Nestlé and exported throughout Latin America. In recent years, Brazilian Panettoni have increased in quality and in popularity due to their low cost and abundance.

Although Panettone is quintessentially Milanese, it is more popular today in central and southern Italy, which accounts for 55% of sales, than in the Milan region in the north, with 45% of sales.

Manufacturers have tried over and over to offer new and better types by launching panettoni stuffed with chocolate chips, cream or even lemon liqueur, or limoncello. but the traditional recipe remains the favourite, with 50 million sold for Christmas in 2002.

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## Pfeffernusse

**Pfeffernusse** **Pfeffernuß** or **Pfeffernusse** (German for pepper nuts) are traditional small German [Christmas cookies](#). Pfeffernusse is flavored with anise, black pepper, nutmeg, and cloves, and typically powdered with confectioner's sugar.

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## Pinnekjøtt

**Pinnekjøtt** (literally "stick meat") is a traditional [Christmas](#) dish in the western parts of Norway. Pinnekjøtt is salted, dried and sometimes smoked lamb's ribs which are steamed, usually, but not necessarily, over birch branches, and served with potato, mashed swede, sauerkraut (and sometimes gravy).

Though still mostly served in the western parts of the country ("Vestlandet"), pinnekjøtt is gaining popularity in other parts of Norway, too.

It is unclear if the dish originally got its name "stick meat" from the birch sticks used in the steaming process, or because of the visual nature of the individual rib bones. However, it

is common to call the individual ribs "pinner" ("sticks"), so that is perhaps the most obvious interpretation.

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## Pio Quinto

**Pio Quinto** is a Nicaraguan dessert. It consists of cake that is drenched in rum and topped with a custard dusted with cinnamon. Some recipes also include raisins. It is eaten after meals or during [Christmas](#) time.

The name is that of Pope Pius V, but the connection is unknown. There is also a Pio Quinto River in Nicaragua.

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## Portuguese sweet bread

**Portuguese sweet bread** ("Massa Sovada" or simply "Massa", "Pão Doce" and the Easter version with eggs is better known as "[Folar](#)") is a bread made with milk, sugar and/or honey to produce a subtly sweet lightly textured loaf. It was traditionally made around the [Christmas](#) and [Easter](#) holidays (often with hard boiled eggs baked into the loaves for the latter holiday) as a round-shaped loaf, but today it is made and available year round. The bread is usually served simply with butter and is sometimes eaten with meals (breakfast in particular), but often as a dessert.

Portuguese sweet bread is common in both Hawaiian cuisine and New England cuisine as it was brought to those regions by their large Portuguese immigrant populations.

### See also

- [Folar](#) salty bread

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## Queso de bola

The **Queso de Bola** (literally "ball of cheese"; edam cheese) is a cheese molded to form the shape of a ball. Together with bibingka and hamon it has long been one of the foods that serves as a [Christmas](#) icon in the Philippines. This food is very popular among Filipinos and usually bought during Christmas. It is also typical in Spain.

### See also

[Christmas customs in the Philippines](#)

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## Reveillon

In France and some other French-speaking countries, a ***réveillon*** is a long dinner, and possibly party, held on the evenings preceding [Christmas Day](#) and New Year's Day. The name of this dinner is based on the word *réveil* (meaning "waking"), because participation involves staying awake until midnight and beyond.

### Food

The food consumed at *réveillons* is generally of an exceptional or luxury nature. For instance, appetizers may include lobster, oysters, escargots or foie gras, etc. The main dish may consist of game (boar, deer...) or another unusual dish. One traditional dish is turkey with chestnuts. Réveillons in Québec will often include some variety of [tourtière](#).

Dessert may consist of a [bûche de Noël](#) (Christmas log: a cake shaped in the form of a log of wood, often flavoured with chocolate, coffee or chestnut). In Provence, the tradition of the *13 desserts* is followed: 13 desserts are served, almost invariably including: *pompe à l'huile* (a flavoured bread), dates, etc.

Quality wine is usually consumed at such dinners, often with champagne or similar sparkling wines as a conclusion.

### Differences

There are certain traditional differences of character between the Christmas and New Year's Day *réveillons*.

Christmas is traditionally a Christian occasion, celebrated within the family, and this family character is retained even among non-believers.

The New Year's Eve, or *Saint-Sylvestre*, *réveillon*, on the other hand, is commonly a party with friends, etc. People may also go out to a cabaret show, or watch live relays of such shows on television.

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## Rice pudding

**Rice pudding** is a dessert enjoyed by people of different cultures all over the world. It is made by combining rice with a sweetener and other ingredients often including milk. Those who prize rice pudding often regard it as a comfort food. Others find some of the varieties to be unpleasantly bland and glutinous.

### Types of Rice Pudding

Rice puddings are found in nearly every area of the world. Recipes can greatly vary even within a single country. The dessert can be boiled or baked. Different types of pudding vary depending on preparation methods and the ingredients selected. The following ingredients are regularly found in rice puddings.

- rice; long or short grain white rice, brown rice, black rice, basmati, or jasmine rice
- milk; (whole milk, coconut milk, cream or evaporated)
- spices; (nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger etc.),
- flavorings; (vanilla, orange, lemon, pistachio, rose water etc.),
- sweetener; (sugar, brown sugar, honey, sweetened condensed milk, fruit or syrups)
- eggs

The following is a short list of various rice puddings from different regions.

### East Asia

- **Kao Niow Dahm** (Thai) Black Rice Pudding
- **Banana Rice Pudding** (Cambodian)
- **Babao Fan** (Chinese, kōi) Eight Treasure Rice Pudding
- **Pulut Hitam** (Malaysian) Black glutinous rice pudding

### South Asia

- **Kheer** (Pakistani/Indian) with slow-boiled milk
- **Firni** (Pakistani/Afghan/North Indian) with broken rice, cardamom and pistachio served cold.

### Middle East

- **Firni**(Afghan/Pakistani), Rice ground to powder cooked with milk and sugar, usually flavored with cardamom, garnished with slivers of pistachios and almonds, as well as with gold or silver *warq* (decorative, edible foil). Today, restaurants offer firni in a wide range of flavours including mango, fig, custard apple, etc.
- **Sütlaç** (Turkish) with milk and vanilla
- **Muhallebi** (Turkish) with rice flour
- **Moghlie** (Arab) with anise and ginger
- **Riz bi Haleeb** (Arab) with rose water
- **Shola-e-zard** (Persian) with saffron

### Europe

- **Arroz con leche** (Spanish) with cinnamon and lemon
- **Arroz Doce** or **Arroz de Leite** (Portuguese) with milk, cinnamon and lemon

- **Budino di Riso** (Italian) with raisins and orange peel
- **!CB;8X0H** (Macedonian)
- **Milchreis** (German) with cinnamon or cherries
- **Mlie na ryža** (Slovak)
- **Orez cu lapte** (Romanian) with milk and cinnamon
- **Risengrød** (Danish) with milk and cinnamon
- **Risalamande** (Danish, after French: Riz à l'amande) with whipped cream, vanilla, and almonds, often served with cherry sauce
- **Ryzogalo** (ῥυζόγαλλο-Greek) with milk and cinnamon
- **Riskrem** (Norwegian)
- **Risengrynsgrøt** (Norwegian)
- **Risgrynsgröt** (Swedish)
- **Riisipuuro** (Finnish)
- **Rijstebrij** (Dutch)
- **Riža na mlijeku** (Croatian)
- **Sutlijaš** (Bosnian/Serbian)
- **Sytlijash** (Albanian)
- **Teurgoule** (Normandy)
- **Oriz na vareniku** (Montenegrin)
- **Tejberizs** (Hungarian) with milk, cinnamon or cocoa powder

## Latin America

- **Arroz con leche** (Latin American) varied preparation
- **Arroz con dulce** (Puerto Rican) with coconut milk

## North America

In Canada and the United States most recipes have descended from European immigrants. In the latter half of the twentieth century Asian and Middle Eastern recipes have become more common. In the U.S. region called New England the most popular is made with long grain rice, eggs, milk, sugar, or in the U.S. state of Vermont maple syrup. This is combined with nutmeg, cinnamon, and raisins. The pudding is usually partially cooked on top of the stove in a double boiler, and then "finished" in an oven.

## History

Rice was first cultivated in Asia. Over thousands of years, various pudding recipes have developed in the Eastern Asia. Some include fruit and honey, while others are far simpler consisting of only rice, water and sugar.

For the west, rice pudding originated in the Middle East or Persia. The dessert gained popularity during the middle ages. Firni, one of the oldest of these middle eastern puddings, is made with rice flour and was introduced to India by the Moghuls. Records of an Indian

sweet milk pudding occur in the 14th century. Shola, flavored with rose water, was introduced to Persia by the 13th century Mongols and is now eaten in much of west Asia.

In Europe, rice pudding with goat's milk was first used by the Romans for medicinal purposes. For this reason, the first written records of rice pudding occur in medical texts. Medieval European sweet boiled rice pudding often was made with almond or cow's milk. Rice pudding appears in 1542 in the then Danish town of Malmö. However, rice was an imported luxury item reserved for the rich. Baked rice puddings featuring elaborate spices and other ingredients appeared in the 17th century. In the 18th century, Rice pudding began to replace rye porridge and barley porridge at festivities in Scandinavia. Over centuries, the European recipe has been simplified resulting the modern dish often criticized for its blandness.

### Rice pudding in folklore

In Scandinavia, rice pudding is traditionally served at [Christmas](#). It sometimes goes by the names *julegrøt* (Yule porridge), or *tomtegröt/nissegrød* (see [tomte](#)). The latter name is due to the old tradition of sharing the meal with the guardian of the homestead, called [tomte](#) or nisse (see also blót). The pudding is usually eaten with cinnamon and sugar, with an 'eye' of butter in the middle. Sometimes an almond is hidden in the pudding. In Sweden, popular belief has it that the one who eats it will be married the following year, whereas in Norway and Denmark, the one who finds the almond will get a prize, often a marzipan figure. Often the leftovers or overproduction of the rice porridge is converted to *risalamande* by adding whipped cream and chopped almonds. In Denmark the game of hiding an almond is usually done with *risalamande* making it harder to find the whole almond among all the chopped ones.

### Rice pudding in literature

A reference to rice pudding is found in the third verse of the seventeenth-century nursery rhyme, "Pop Goes the Weasel:"

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,  
Half a pound of treacle.  
Mix it up and make it nice,  
Pop goes the weasel.

Rice pudding is mentioned frequently in literature of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, typically in the context of a cheap, plain, familiar food, often served to children or invalids, and often rendered boring by too-frequent inclusion in menus.

In Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Kenelm Chillingly*, a would-be host reassures a prospective guest: "Don't fear that you shall have only mutton-chops and a rice-pudding...". In Henry James' *A Passionate Pilgrim*, the narrator laments: "having dreamed of lamb and spinach and a salade de saison, I sat down in penitence to a mutton-chop and a rice pudding."

Charles Dickens relates an incident of shabby treatment in *A Schoolboy's Story*: "it was imposing on Old Cheeseman to give him nothing but boiled mutton through a whole

Vacation, but that was just like the system. When they didn't give him boiled mutton, they gave him rice pudding, pretending it was a treat. And saved the butcher."

In Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians*, the children express dissatisfaction with their food. "My father and Esther... are having roast fowl, three vegetables, and four kinds of pudding," Pip says angrily. "It isn't fair!" His sister notes that "we had dinner at one o'clock." "Boiled mutton and carrots and rice pudding!" her brother replies, witheringly.

*Rice Pudding* is the title and subject of a poem by A. A. Milne, in which the narrator professes puzzlement as to what is the matter with Mary Jane, who is "crying with all her might and main/And she won't eat her dinner—rice pudding again—/What is the matter with Mary Jane?" As the poem proceeds, the reader comes to suspect that Mary Jane's problem is connected with the word "again."

An 1884 New York Times article is entitled *Living on a Small Salary: Close Economy Practiced by a Clerk and his Wife. They Live Comfortably in a Brooklyn Flat and Save Nearly \$300 Out of a Yearly Income of \$1000*. "You observe," says the husband, "that although we have but little beyond the bare necessities of life we manage to live comfortably and happily." "Yes, indeed, we are happy," interjects the wife. The reporter describes their evening meal as a plate containing "a nice cut of beef, a couple of boiled potatoes, and a liberal portion of green peas." For dessert, there is rice pudding, which the reporter describes as "truly a delicious compound of rice and egg and sugared frosting."

A 1917 report by the International Committee of the Red Cross, on treatment of Turkish prisoners of war in Egypt describes the food with approval. The "ordinary diet" is described as "Breakfast: Arab bread; sweetened fresh milk. Lunch: Arab bread; beef; rice, vegetables. Dinner: Arab bread; rice soup; rice pudding."

Rice pudding is mentioned with much more affection in an incident related by Walt Whitman in *Specimen Days*. Whitman visited an invalid soldier who "was very sick, with no appetite... he confess'd that he had a hankering for a good home-made rice pudding—thought he could relish it better than anything... I soon procured B. his rice pudding. A Washington lady, (Mrs. O'C.), hearing his wish, made the pudding herself, and I took it up to him the next day. He subsequently told me he lived upon it for three or four days."

In Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* the supercomputer Deep Thought derives the existence of rice pudding from first principles. This is to counterpoint between the complexity of Deep Thought and its task of exploring the eternal verities, with simplicity of the pudding.

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## Romeritos

**Romeritos** are a Mexican dish, consisting of patties of dried prawns and sprigs of a wild plant known as [Romerito](#) that resembles rosemary served in a mole sauce. They are traditionally served at [Christmastime](#).

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## Rum ball

**Rum balls** are a cake-like confection, being sweet dense balls flavoured with chocolate and rum. They are roughly the size of a golf ball and often coated in chocolate sprinkles, desiccated coconut, or cocoa.

Rum balls are frequently made using leftover or slightly stale cakes as the major ingredient. They are thus a convenient way of gaining maximum use from a cake that might not be fully eaten while fresh. Some cake shops therefore use rum balls as a way of recycling unsold stock, although many make them deliberately using fresh ingredients. In this respect, they are similar to lamingtons.

To make a rum ball, the cake (or biscuit) material is crushed and mixed with cocoa and a moist binding ingredient, such as jam or condensed milk. Other optional ingredients can also be added, such as nuts. When the mixture holds together firmly, it is rolled into balls and then coated.

Rum balls are a popular [Christmas](#) snack in Australia and New Zealand.

### Recipe

There are many recipes for rum balls. Each family has their own ingredients or variations on the quantity of each ingredient. One recipe is listed below:

- 250g of Marie biscuits (or Arrowroot biscuits)
- 1 cup of desiccated coconut
- 2 tablespoons of cocoa
- 1 400g can of sweetened condensed milk
- Rum, or similar Spirit - e.g. brandy or sherry

Crush the biscuits finely. Add coconut and cocoa and mix well. Add rum. Stir in sweetened condensed milk. Form into balls and roll in coconut or chocolate sprinkles. Makes 40 - 50

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## Rumtopf

**Rumtopf**, which literally means *rum pot*, is a German dessert, traditionally eaten around [Christmas](#). A mixture of various kinds of fruit, rum and sugar is filled into a large stoneware pot (the eponymous *rum pot*) and matured for several months until the fruit is very soft and completely saturated with rum. Rumtopf may be served with ice cream or waffles.

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## Smalahove

**Smalahove** (or **smalehovud**) is a Norwegian traditional dish, usually eaten around and before [Christmas](#) time, made from a sheep's head. The skin and fleece of the head is torched and the head is salted and dried. The head is boiled and served with mashed rutabaga and potatoes.

Originally, smalahove was considered eaten only by poor people, but in modern days it's considered to be a delicacy.

In 2001 an EU directive forbade the production of smalahove from sheep, due to fear of the possibility of transmission of scrapie, a deadly, degenerative prion disease of sheep and goats, even though scrapie does not appear to be transmissible to humans. It is now only allowed to be produced from lamb heads.

Some Norwegians consider Smalahove to be unappealing or even repulsive. It is mostly enjoyed by enthusiasts.

### How to eat smalahove

It's common to start by the ear. This is the most fatty area and you have to eat it while it's warm. The same applies for the eye.

You begin with the foremost part of the head and cut your way backwards between the teeth of the upper and lower jaw. Then you break the jaw open to get access to the eye. Carefully slice the eye open and scrape out the eye apple. What's left, the eye muscle, is considered by many to be the best on the entire sheep. Another delicacy is the tongue.

Continue by eating downwards from the forehead. Around the jaw is the meat that's the least fatty.

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## Sorpotel

**Sorpotel** is a dish from Goa, India usually served at festivals (such as [Christmas](#) and weddings) and made from pork. The dish requires the use of the pork along with the liver,

the heart and the kidney of the pig which is cooked in a very spicy sauce. The taste improves from day to day.

It is sometimes said that sorpotel boasts as many versions as there are cooks in the state of Goa.

Each family proudly flaunts its version of the must-have Christmas dish - although it is prepared and served whenever the need for a special meal arises.

Sorpotel includes regular ingredients like pork, liver, spices and in some versions pork blood, roasted blends of spices - recipes of which are guarded amongst families like state secrets. Use of different utensils is also said to vary taste - so it is common to have cooks dedicate an earthen pot or a copper one to the preparation of sorpotel.

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## Spritzgebäck

A **spritzgebäck** is a type of German [Christmas cookie](#). They are relatively easy to make and require only common ingredients, including eggs, butter, sugar, and flour. When made correctly, they are crisp, fragile, somewhat dry, and buttery.

Spritzgebäck is a common pastry in Germany and served often during [Christmas time](#). During this time, it is not unusual for mothers to spend the afternoons baking with their children for one or two weeks. Traditionally, mothers bake Spritzgebäck after their own special recipes, which they pass down to their children.

*Traditional recipe*

Spritzgebäck

250 g sugar

1 egg

375 g wheat flour

250 g butter

1 small packet vanilla sugar

75 g hoed almonds

Stir butter until foamy, add sugar, egg, flour, vanilla sugar and almonds. Knead until you formed a compact dough. Store in a cool place over night.

Use a meat grinder to press the dough in form (make sure you use a special attachment). Cut the long stripes into smaller ones (approx. 5 cm) and bake them at 175°C for 12 minutes.

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# Stollen

**Stollen** is a bread-like cake traditionally made in Germany, usually eaten during the [Christmas](#) season as *Weihnachtsstollen* or *Christstollen*. Stollen (originally *Striezel*) was created in Dresden in around 1450, and the most famous Stollen is still the *Dresdner Stollen*, sold, among other places, at the local [Striezelmarkt](#) Christmas market.

Stollen is a light airy fruitcake made with yeast, water and flour, and usually dried citrus peel (called "Zitronad(e)"), dried fruit, almonds, and spices such as cardamom and cinnamon; the dough is quite low in sugar. The finished cake is sprinkled with icing sugar. The traditional weight is 2 kg, but smaller sizes are now available.

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## History

The old name *Striezel* was from *strüzel* or *stroczel*, "awaken" (Old Prussian: *troskeilis*), which came to mean "loaf of bread". The shape of the cake was originally meant to represent the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, and was one of a number of baked goods created to represent aspects of the Crucifixion: the pretzel represented Jesus' bonds, and the (holeless) doughnut (Pfannkuchen) represented the sponge given to Jesus on the cross. However, the Stollen reminded Erzgebirge miners of the entrance to a mine tunnel, which is the literal meaning of *Stollen*, and they renamed it.

When Stollen was first baked, the ingredients were very different. The Advent season was a time of fasting, and bakers were not allowed to use butter, only oil, so the cake was tasteless and hard. In 1647, Prince Elector Ernst and his brother Duke Albrecht decided to remedy this by writing to the then Pope, Pope Innocent X. They explained that Saxon bakers needed to use butter as oil was so expensive and hard to come by, and had to be made from turnips, which was unhealthy. The Pope granted the use of butter without having to pay a fine - but only for the Prince-Elector and his family and household. In 1691 others were also permitted to use butter, but with the condition of having to pay annually 1/20th of a gold Gulden to support the building of the Freiberg Cathedral. The ban on butter was removed when Saxony became Protestant.

Over the centuries the cake changed from being a simple, fairly tasteless "bread" to a sweeter cake with richer ingredients such as [marzipan](#), although the traditional Stollen is today still not as sweet as the copies made around the world.

## Stollen today

Today the cake is available in many parts of the world. The true Dresden Stollen, however, is produced in the city and distinguished by a special seal depicting the city's famous king, August the Strong. This "official" Stollen is produced by only 150 bakers.

Every year in Dresden a *Stollenfest* takes place. This recent tradition has taken place only since 1994, but the idea comes from the days of August the Strong in the 18th century: the king loved pomp and feasts, and in 1730 impressed his subjects with a giant 1.7-tonne Stollen big enough for everyone to have a portion. Today the festival takes place on the Saturday before the second Advent Sunday, and the cake weighs between three and four tonnes. A carriage takes it in a parade through the streets of Dresden to the Christmas market, where it is ceremoniously cut into pieces and distributed among the crowd, for a small sum which goes to charity. The largest Stollen was baked in 2000: it weighed 4.2 tonnes and is in the Guinness Book of World Records.

## See also

- [Striezelmarkt](#)

## Sugar plum

A **sugar plum** is a piece of candy that is made of sugar and shaped in a small round or oval shape.

Sugar plums are widely associated with [Christmas](#), through cultural phenomena such as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, as well as the line "Visions of sugar plums danced in their heads," from "A Visit from St. Nicholas," better known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas."

## The Sugar Plum Tree

Sugar plums have also gained widespread recognition through the poem "*The Sugar Plum Tree*" by Eugene Field. The poem begins "Have you ever heard of the Sugar-Plum Tree? 'Tis a marvel of great renown!"

## References

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- The Sugar Plum Tree, by Eugene Field (from FirstScience)

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## Szaloncukor



Szaloncukor

**Szaloncukor** (literally: "parlour candy") is a type of sweets traditionally associated with [Christmas](#) in Hungary. It is usually made of fondant, covered by chocolate and wrapped in shiny coloured foil, then hung on the [Christmas tree](#) as decoration.

The tradition of hanging these candies on the Christmas tree started in the 19th century. It was named *szaloncukor* because the tree usually stood in the parlour (*szalon* in Hungarian). (*Cukor* means "sugar" or "candy").

Fondant candies originally came in a few flavours (vanilla and strawberry for example), but now there is a wide variety of different kinds of candies, including jelly, coconut, hazelnut and lots of other flavours. It is usually hung on the tree with strings or small metal hooks.

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## Tamale

A **tamale** or **tamal** (from Nahuatl *tamalli*) is a traditional Latin American food that begins with a corn meal dough called masa (or a masa mix such as Maseca) mixed with water. This mixture is then filled with meats, cheese (post-colonial) and sliced chiles or any preparation according to taste. The tamale is wrapped in a corn husk for before cooking.

Tamales are an ancient American food, made throughout the continent for over 5000 years. Their essence is the masa maize dough, usually filled with a sweet or savory filling, wrapped in plant leaves or corn husks, and cooked, usually by steaming, until firm. Tamales were developed as a portable ration for use by war parties in the ancient Americas, and were as ubiquitous and varied as the sandwich is today.

Tamales are difficult to make. The procedure in Central and Northern Mexico goes as follows: the masa (about one-inch diameter ball or so) is smeared like butter on the individual corn husk with a spoon. Then the filling (see below) is placed length-wise on the center of the husk; meats (chicken, pork) should be pre-cooked. The sides of the husk are folded and the newly made tamale is steam-cooked for an hour or until the masa has a cake-like consistency. The proportions of filling and masa vary widely according to taste. Once made, however, they can be frozen quite easily (the husks help to keep them from sticking together) and reheated as needed. Because of this, the making of tamales is often a social occasion, with friends and family all pitching into help make hundreds of tamales to be shared out.



A batch of tamales in the *tamalera*

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## Tamales in Latin America

Tamales are a favorite quick breakfast dish in Mexico, where street vendors can be seen serving them from huge, steaming, covered pots (*tamaleras*). In some places like Zacatecas, the tamale is often placed inside a wheat bread roll to form a *torta de tamal*, which is substantial enough to keep the breakfaster going until Mexico's traditionally late lunch hour.

The most common (and traditional) filling is pork or chicken, in either red or green salsa or mole. Another very traditional variation is to add sugar to the corn mix and fill it with raisins or other dried fruit and make a sweet tamale (*tamal de dulce*). Instead of corn husks, banana leaves are used in tropical parts of the country such as the states bordering the Gulf of Mexico, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and the Yucatán Peninsula. These tamales are rather square in

shape, often very large (15 inches or more) and thick; a local name for these in Southern Tamaulipas is *zacahuil*. To the south, banana-leaf tamales are also common in the neighboring countries of Central America.

To make a full meal, the tamale is often accompanied by atole, hot chocolate, or champurrado. In El Salvador and Honduras they are wrapped in banana leaves, and there are several varieties, including *tamal de gallina*, *tamal pisque*, and *tamal de elote*. They are generally large, similar in size to the tamales of southeastern Mexico.

In Guatemala, in addition to El Salvador versions, there are Tamales without filling and are served as the bread or starch portion of a meal:

1. Tamal de elote (corn tamal sometimes sweet taste and yellow),
2. Tamalito de chipilin (Chipilin is a delicious green leaf) or
3. Tamal blanco (white tamal made with corn), very simple but unique taste.

During Christmas holidays, tamales of rice flour are a special treat for Guatemalans. The preparation time of this type of tamal is long, due to the amount of time required to cook down and thicken the rice flour base.

Corn-husk wrapped tamales are also popular in southeastern Cuba.

Peruvian tamales tend to be spicy, larger, and are wrapped in banana leaves. Common fillings are chicken or pork, usually accompanied by boiled eggs, olives, peanuts or a piece of chilli pepper. Smaller tamales wrapped in corn husks are called humitas, and are usually sweeter.

Tamales are also found in Colombia, where there are several varieties (including *boyacense* and *santandereano*). Ecuador also has a variety of tamales and humitas, they can be filled with fresh cheese, pork, chicken or raisins. Ecuadorian tamales are usually wrapped in corn husk or achira (aka Canna) leaves.

## **Tamales in the United States**

The plural is tamales, and this is the form of the word most often seen in the United States among Hispanics, with the singular frequently given as tamale (seeming incorrect to other Spanish-speakers, who know the correct form is tamal) As tamales have acquired mainstream popularity in the United States, other fillings have become more common, such as beef; another popular filling is corn (partially mashed, like creamed corn). Tamales are popular as Christmas meals in the southwestern states of the USA. A basic modern southwestern tamale contains a spicy meat filling, usually shredded pork or beef, and is often served with a chili con carne sauce.

The tamale is a staple food along the Mississippi Delta. It grew in popularity in the early 1900s when Mexican farmworkers introduced it to black workers in the cotton fields in the deep South.

## **Tamales in the Caribbean**

The tamale is also a staple in Belize, where it is also known (in English) by the Spanish name *bollo*. Confusion with the nomenclature also leads to the plural form being used as a singular: thus, "a tamales" [rare].

Another variation of the tamale is the pastelito found on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a Spanish derivative left over from the days when Trinidad was a colony of Spain and thus shares many similarities with its Latin American counterparts. Pastelitos are wrapped in banana leaves for cooking and have a rectangular shape, roughly about 6"x3"x1/2" in dimensions varying according to preference. The shell is made of cornmeal and the filling commonly consists of well seasoned ground beef (sometimes substituted with chicken though very rarely) with prunes, raisins, capers, and olives. The result is a rich contrast of sweet, savoury, and salty flavours. It is a staple favourite of the Christmas holiday seasonal foods on the islands, rarely if ever seen during the rest of the year, and served for breakfast, as a supplement to other meals such as lunch and dinner, or on their own as a simple snack along with other seasonal favourites such as sorrel.

## Tourtiere

A **tourtière** is a meat pie originating from Quebec, usually made with ground pork and/or veal, or beef. It is a traditional [Christmas](#) and New Year's Eve dish in Quebec, but is also enjoyed and sold in grocery stores all year long. This kind of pie is known as *pâté à la viande* (literally, meat pie) in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. Tourtière is not exclusive to the province of Québec. Tourtière is a traditional French-Canadian dish served by generations of French-Canadian families throughout Canada. In the U.S. state of Vermont citizens of Québécois ancestry have introduced the recipe to the state's culture, and it is traditionally eaten on Christmas Eve.

### Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean

The tourtières of the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area are deep-dish meat pies made with potatoes and various meats (often including game), which are cut into small cubes. In Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, this variety of tourtière is sometimes referred to in French and in English as *tourtière du Lac Saint-Jean* to distinguish it from the varieties of tourtière with ground meat, described above.

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## Trifle

A **trifle** is a British dessert dish made from thick (or often solidified) custard, fruit, sponge cake, fruit juice or, more recently, jelly and whipped cream, usually arranged in layers with fruit and sponge on the bottom, custard and cream on top. Some trifles contain a small amount of alcohol (port, or, most commonly sweet sherry or madeira wine) - non-alcoholic versions use fruit juice instead, as the liquid is necessary to moisten the cake. Trifle containing sherry is sometimes called "**Sherry Trifle**" or referred to as being "**High Church**". One popular variant has the sponges soaked in liquid-gelatin dessert when the trifle is made, which sets when refrigerated. The cake and jelly bind together and produce a uniquely



pleasant texture if made in the correct proportions (there should not be too much jelly added, or nucleation will not occur).



Trifle

A well-made trifle is often used for decoration as well as taste, incorporating the bright, layered colours of the fruit, jelly, jam, and the contrast of the creamy yellow custard and white cream.

Trifles are often served at [Christmas](#) time, sometimes as a lighter alternative to the massively dense [christmas pudding](#).

A **Creole trifle** (also sometimes known as a **Russian cake**) is a different but slightly related dessert item consisting of pieces of a variety of cakes mixed together and packed firmly, moistened with alcohol (commonly red wine or rum) and a sweet syrup or fruit juice, and chilled. The resulting cake contains an arabesque of color and flavor. Bakeries in New Orleans have been known to produce such cakes out of their leftover or imperfect baked goods.

In Italy, trifle is known as Zuppa Inglese.

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## Turrón

**Turrón** (Spanish), **torrone** (Italian), or **torró** (Valencian or Catalan), is a nougat confection, typically made of honey, sugar, and egg white, coated in crushed, toasted almonds, and usually shaped into either a rectangular tablet or a round cake. Nowadays it is mostly consumed as a traditional dessert for Christmas.

Turrón appears to be of Arabian origin; it is known definitely to have existed at least since the 16th century in the city formerly known as Sexona, later known by its Valencian name of Xixona (Jijona in Spanish), in the current province of Alicante. Turrón is now commonly

consumed in most of Spain, some countries of Ibero-America, and in Rousillon (France). The Italian Torrone, quite similar to the Spanish turrón, is typical from Bagnara and Cremona.

Turrón may be roughly classified as:

- Soft (the *Jijona* variety): Based on a mass mixture of oil, honey, sugar, eggs and almonds which make up an easily edible brick.
- Tough (the *Alicante* variety): Made up as a compact block of whole almonds in a tough mass of eggs, honey and sugar.

Apart from the traditional Alicante and Jijona varieties, Agramunt and torró de gat (a variety from Cullera made with popcorn and honey) turrónes are also highly appreciated.

There are many variations on this product. [Marzipan](#) (*mazapan*) with candied fruits, *yema* (egg yolk and sugar) and coconut are the most well-known, but in recent years there had been a great diversification and nowadays it is possible to find a great variety of flavours: chocolate with puffed rice or whole almonds; all kinds of chocolate pralines, with or without liquor, candied fruits or whole nuts; fruit pralines and even sugarless variations (sweetened with fructose or artificial sweeteners).

The quality of the product is determined by the quantity of almond in the mix. To be real turrón of Jijona, it has to have at least 64% almonds. The Alicante variety needs to have at least 60% almond.

The 16th century. Manual de Mugerres (a handbook of recipes for cosmetics and some foodstuffs) has what is probably the oldest extant Spanish turrón recipe (also available in English). It calls for honey and some egg whites, cooked until it becomes breakable once cooled. Once the honey is caramelized the recipe suggests putting into it either pine nuts, almonds or hazelnuts, peeled and roasted. The mix is then cooked a bit further, and finally taken away from the fire and cut into "*piñas*" or slices.

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## Twelve-dish Christmas Eve supper

The traditional [Christmas Eve supper](#) in Poland ([Wigilia](#)), Ukraine (!20B0 25G5@0, Sviata vecheria) and Lithuania ([Kk ios](#)) consists of twelve dishes representing the twelve months of the year. The tradition of the supper can be traced back to pre-Christian times and connected with remembrance of the souls of deceased ancestors.

This was a common Eastern Orthodox tradition in the Russian Empire, which has become virtually extinct in Russia as a result of the official atheism of the former Soviet Union.

The supper consists of almost the same dishes in all three countries, though there are some variances between them. Because of the fast, no meat, eggs or milk are allowed during the supper. Thus fish, mushrooms and various types of grain are the main offerings.

In Poland and Ukraine the supper begins with eating [kutia](#), but in Lithuania this tradition is rare. Instead, poppy milk (*aguons pienas*) together with *kk iukai* are served and takes a significant part in the Lithuanian Christmas Eve menu. Poppy seeds are widely used for Christmas Eve dishes, because they symbolize abundance and prosperity.



Christmas Eve supper. Only compote, [kutia](#), borscht, herring, varenyky and salt are shown.

Regarding the fish dishes, usually herring, carp or pike are eaten. In Christian tradition it is explained that fish symbolizes the fact that Jesus was a fisherman. In Lithuania herring (Lithuanian: *silk*) dishes are rich and variable. Usually *silk su morkomis* (herring with carrots), or *silk su grybais* (herring with mushrooms) are served on Christmas Eve.

Mushrooms, especially dried or pickled, are also one of the main dishes eaten on Christmas Eve. Sauerkraut with wild mushrooms or peas, red borscht, mushroom or fish soup are eaten in Poland and Ukraine.

Boiled or deep fried pierogis (dumplings) (Pl: *pierogi*; Ukr: *20@5=8:8*, varenyky; Lt: *ausels*) with a wide variety of fillings (sauerkraut, mushrooms, smashed poppy seeds, etc.), are among the most popular dishes. Doughnuts filled with jam (Pl:; Ukr: *20*, *pampushky*) are served for a dessert in Poland and Ukraine, but in Lithuania sweet dishes are not common, as they are believed inappropriate for the atmosphere of the evening.

As for beverages, traditionally dried fruit compote or cranberry kisiel (Lithuanian: *spanguolis kisielius*) are common.

The Christmas Eve supper is usually held under candle light and starts in the evening after the first star appears in the sky. The star symbolizes the birth of Jesus in Christian tradition and a soul of deceased ancestors in pre-Christian beliefs. Quiet, dim-lighting, and a somewhat mystical atmosphere is characteristic for Christmas Eve supper. It is said in Lithuania that many strange things happen on that night and there are plenty of rituals and magic associated with Christmas Eve. See also Christmas Eve Magic.

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## Vanillekipferl

**Vanillekipferl** are small, crescent shaped biscuits flavored with vanilla or artificial flavoring and a heavy dusting of powdered sugar, originating from Vienna in Austria. Traditionally, they are made at [Christmas](#), but they can be enjoyed all year round and are often for sale in Viennese coffee shops. They are said to have been created in the shape of the Turkish crescent to celebrate the victory of the Austrian army over the Turkish in one of the many wars between the nations.

They are also widely baked in Germany as a part of the typical Christmas baking. Since in Germany the Advent is celebrated by several denominations of Christianity on the four Sundays preceding Christmas, many kinds of biscuits and sweets are consumed during this time and have become typical for winter time.

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## Wassail

**Wassail** is a hot, spiced punch often associated with winter celebrations of northern Europe, usually those connected with the [Christmas](#) holiday such as [Christmas](#), New Year's and [Twelfth Night](#). Particularly popular in Germanic countries, the term itself is a contraction of the Old English toast *wæs þu hæl*, or "be thou hale!" (i.e., "be in good health"). Alternate expressions predating the term, with approximately the same meaning, include both the Old Norse *ves heill* and Old English *wes hál*.

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### History

While the beverage typically served as "wassail" at modern holiday feasts with a medieval theme most closely resembles mulled cider, historical wassail was completely different, more likely to be mulled beer. Sugar, ale, ginger, nutmeg, and cinnamon would be placed in a bowl, heated, and topped with slices of toast as sops. Hence the first stanza of the traditional carol the Gloucestershire Wassail dating back to the Middle Ages:

*Wassail! wassail! all over the town,  
Our toast it is white and our ale it is brown;  
Our bowl it is made of the white maple tree;  
With the wassailing bowl, we'll drink to thee.*

## Recipes

Recipes vary, but usually call for a base of either wine or fruit juices (apple being popular) simmered with mulling spices, possibly fortified with spirits such as brandy. Orange slices might be added to the mixture. (In northern Europe, oranges once enjoyed the status of a novelty Christmas fruit. As oranges come into season in the winter, in pre-refrigeration days that might be the only time of year that they were available to cold climates -- provided they survived shipment from the warmer countries in which they were grown.)

## Other uses and similarities

- Wassail is very similar to a Roman winter beverage called *calda* which, according to the recipes of Apicius, consisted of wine cut with water, then heated, sweetened with honey, and flavored with aromatic spices. (Many Christmas traditions actually derive from those of the Roman festival of Saturnalia, so a connection between the two is possible.)
- Today, many microbreweries produce a beverage very similar to wassail – spiced beer – during the winter months.
- A Wassail is traditional ceremony carried out to ensure a good crop of cider apples for the coming harvest. See [wassailing](#).
- Wassail or *wæs þu hæl* is a greeting often used by Neopagans to avoid saying anything Christian. It can be used as a form of farewell and greeting. It can be used at any time of the year or day and is not required that it is related to toasting. The belief that it is only done in respect to apples comes from Fraser's *The Golden Bough* in which the custom is mentioned. As this practice has been revived -- ironically -- by churches, Mummers, and Morris troupes, many non-pagans have come across the term.
- In the modern day, Wassail is most commonly recognized as an obscure reference in various traditional [Christmas carols](#): "Wassail, wassail all over the town," for example, or "Here we come [a-wassailing](#) among the leaves so green". Wassail-themed songs were once sung by winter carollers who went from house to house, singing to the residents in exchange for small gifts of money, food and drink (often wassail.)

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## Yule log

A **Yule log** is a large log which is burned in the hearth as a part of traditional Yule or [Christmas](#) celebrations in some cultures.

In Northern Europe, winter festivities were once considered to be a Feast of the Dead, complete with ceremonies full of spirits, devils, and the haunting presence of the Norse god, Odin, and his night riders. One particularly durable Solstice festival was "Jol" (also known as

"Jule" and pronounced "Yule"), a feast celebrated throughout Northern Europe and particularly in Scandinavia to honor Jolnir, another name for Odin. Since Odin was the god of intoxicating drink and ecstasy, as well as the god of death, Yule customs varied greatly from region to region. Odin's sacrificial beer became the specially blessed Christmas ale mentioned in medieval lore, and fresh food and drink were left on tables after Christmas feasts to feed the roaming Yuletide ghosts. Even the bonfires of former ancient times survived in the tradition of the Yule Log, perhaps the most universal of all Christmas symbols.

The origins of the Yule Log can be traced back to the Midwinter festivals in which the Norsemen indulged...nights filled with feasting, "drinking Yule" and watching the fire leap around the log burning in the home hearth. The ceremonies and beliefs associated with the Yule Log's sacred origins are closely linked to representations of health, fruitfulness and productivity. In England, the Yule was cut and dragged home by oxen or horses as the people walked alongside and sang merry songs. It was often decorated with evergreens and sometimes sprinkled with grain or cider before it was finally set alight.

In Yugoslavia, the Yule Log was cut just before dawn on [Christmas Eve](#) and carried into the house at twilight. The wood itself was decorated with flowers, colored silks and gold, and then doused with wine and an offering of grain. In the area of France known as Provence, families would go together to cut the Yule Log, singing as they went along. These songs asked for blessings to be bestowed upon their crops and their flocks. The people of Provence called their Yule Log the *tréfoire* and, with great ceremony, carried the log around the house three times and christened it with wine before it was set ablaze.

To all Europeans, the Yule Log was believed to bring beneficial magic and was kept burning for at least twelve hours and sometimes as long as twelve days, warming both the house and those who resided within. When the fire of the Yule Log was finally quenched, a small fragment of the wood would be saved and used to light the next year's log. It was also believed that as long as the Yule Log burned, the house would be protected from witchcraft. The ashes that remained from the sacred Yule Log were scattered over fields to bring fertility, or cast into wells to purify and sweeten the water. Sometimes, the ashes were used in the creation of various charms...to free cattle from vermin, for example, or to ward off hailstorms.

Some sources state that the origin of Yule is often associated with an ancient Scandinavian fertility god and that the large, single Log is representative of a phallic idol. Tradition states that this Log was required to burn for twelve days and a different sacrifice to the fertility god had to be offered in the fire on each of those twelve days.

Televising burning yule logs has become a Christmas tradition for some television stations in the United States, such as *The Yule Log* on New York City's WPIX-TV.

The expression "Yule log" has also come to refer to log-shaped Christmas cakes, also known as "chocolate logs" or "[Bûche de Noël](#)".

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## Christmas-linked holidays

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[Chrismukkah](#) | [Christmas Eve](#) | [Christmas Sunday](#) | [Distaff day](#) | [Epiphany](#) | [Handsel](#)  
[Monday](#) | [Hogmanay](#) | [HumanLight](#) | [Night of the Radishes](#) | [Posadas](#) | [Purification of the](#)  
[Virgin](#) | [Sol Invictus](#) | [St. Stephen's Day](#) | [Twelfth Night](#) | [Twelve Days of Christmas](#) | [Twelve](#)  
[Holy Days](#) | [Winterval](#)

# Black Friday

**Black Friday**, the day after Thanksgiving in the United States, is historically one of the busiest retail shopping days of the year. Many consider it the "official" beginning to the holiday season. Most retailers will open very early and usually provide massive discounts on their products.

The use of the word "black" relates to business accountants traditionally recording losses in red ink and profits in black ink.

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## Origin

There are two theories as to the origin of the term. The first is derived from the fact that many retailers report some of their highest profits on this day. The second theory is that retailers traditionally operated at a financial loss for most of the year (January thru November) and made their profit during the holiday season. Black Friday is the beginning of the period where they would no longer have losses (the red) and instead take in the year's profits (the black).

According to [The Word Spy](#):

Earliest Citation:

Christmas decorations around Tampa Bay started going up in late October, and business has been brisk since then. And while Friday--known as Black Friday for the legendary hordes--will be the biggest shopping day for many area stores, others ring up the greatest sales the Saturday before Christmas.

—Marilyn Marks, "Retailers expect good sales this Christmas," St. Petersburg Times, November 27, 1986

An earlier reference speaking to the Friday after Thanksgiving.

A BLACK FRIDAY.

There have been many Black Fridays in recent history. Most of them have been days of financial panic. There has been none of blacker foreboding than last Friday. And the blackness is not loss or fear of loss in stocks and bonds.

New York Times (1857-Current file).

New York, N.Y.: Dec 3, 1922. pg. 38, 1 pgs

ISSN/ISBN 03624331



Although Black Friday is typically the busiest shopping day of the year in terms of customer traffic, it is not typically the day with the highest sales volume. That is usually either [Christmas Eve](#) or the last Saturday before [Christmas](#).

## Response (Buy Nothing Day)

Anti-capitalist protestors have chosen this day as Buy Nothing Day in North America (though this day is not especially important in Canada's commercial year [compare to [boxing day](#)]), where those concerned about the increasing power and influence of consumer corporations are urged to not make consumer purchases.

## Workers

Employees of retail stores have for years referred to Black Friday in a satirical way, to note the extremely stressful and hectic nature of the day. Heavy traffic and customer demands added to the long hours make it a difficult day.

## Controversy

In recent years, some retailers (including Wal-Mart, Target, Best Buy, and Staples) have claimed that the advertisements they send in advance of Black Friday and the prices included in those advertisement are intellectual property and protected by the Digital Millenium Copyright Act (DMCA).

Using the take down provision of the DMCA, these retailers have threatened various internet web sites who post Black Friday prices to the internet in advance of the intended release date by the retailers. This policy apparently derives from a fear that competitors, in addition to customers, will also have access to this information and use it for competitive advantage. The actual validity of the claim that prices are protected intellectual property is uncertain as prices might be considered a 'fact' in which case they would not receive the same level of protection as pure intellectual property.

The benefit of threatening internet sites with a DMCA based lawsuit has proved tenuous at best. While some sites have complied with the requests, others have either ignored the threats or simply continued to post the information under the name of a similar sounding fictional retailer.

## See also

- [Boxing Day](#)

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# Boxing Day

**Observed by:** Commonwealth countries

**Type:** International, Commonwealth countries

**Date:** The first weekday after Christmas Day

**Related to:** [St Stephen's Day](#)

**Boxing Day** is a public holiday observed in many Commonwealth countries on the first day (other than Sunday) following [Christmas Day](#).<sup>[1][2][3][4]</sup>

In common usage, when 26 December falls on a Sunday, this is now referred to as Boxing Day<sup>[5]</sup> despite Boxing Day officially occurring on the 27 December<sup>[6][7][8]</sup>. From 1954 to 1993 in the United Kingdom, when 26 December was a Sunday it was referred to as [Christmas Sunday](#), and "Boxing Day" in popular usage referred to the 27th, but this practice had fallen out of use by the time of the next occurrence in 1999.

Boxing Day is often celebrated by giving gifts and donations to the poor and needy.

In some Commonwealth countries, fixed-date holidays falling on Saturday or Sunday are often observed on the next weekday, so if Boxing Day falls on a Saturday then Monday 28th December is a public holiday; in the UK and Australia this is accomplished by Royal Proclamation.

If Christmas Day falls on a Saturday itself then the Boxing Day holiday is automatically on the following Monday, and no Royal Proclamation is required. In such a circumstance, a 'substitute bank holiday in lieu of Christmas Day' is declared for Tuesday 28th December, this being the next available working day - thus the Boxing Day holiday occurs before the substitute Christmas holiday.

Although the same legislation (Bank Holidays Act 1871) originally established the Bank Holidays throughout the British Isles, the holiday after Christmas was defined as Boxing Day in England and Wales and Northern Ireland and [St Stephen's Day](#) for The Republic Of Ireland (and now by a few people in Northern Ireland). St Stephen's Day is fixed as the 26 December.<sup>[9]</sup>

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## Origins

There is great dispute over the true origins of Boxing Day. The more common stories include:

- In feudal times, Christmas was a reason for a gathering of extended families. All the serfs would gather their families in the manor of their lord, which made it easier for the lord of the estate to hand out annual stipends to the serfs. After all the Christmas parties on December 26th, the lord of the estate would give practical goods such as cloth, grains, and tools to the serfs who lived on his land. Each family would get a box full of such goods the day after Christmas. Under this explanation, there was nothing voluntary about this transaction; the lord of the manor was obliged to supply these goods. Because of the boxes being given out, the day was called Boxing Day.
- In Britain many years ago, it was common practice for the servants to carry boxes to their employers when they arrived for their day's work on the day after Christmas. Their employers would then put coins in the boxes as special end-of-year gifts. This can be compared with the modern day concept of Christmas bonuses. The servants carried boxes for the coins, hence the name Boxing Day.
- In churches, it was traditional to open the church's donation box on Christmas Day, and the money in the donation box was to be distributed to the poorer or lower class citizens on the next day. In this case, the "box" in "Boxing Day" comes from that one gigantic lockbox in which the donations were left.
- In Britain because many servants had to work for their employers on Christmas Day they would instead open their presents (i.e., boxes) the next day, which therefore became known as Boxing Day.
- Boxing Day was the day when the wren, the king of birds was captured and put in a box and introduced to each household in the village when he would be asked for a successful year and a good harvest. See Frazer's Golden Bough.
- Evidence can also be found in Wassail songs such as:

*Where are you going ? said Milder to Malder,  
Oh where are you going ? said Fessel to Foe,  
I'm going to hunt the cutty wren said Milder to Malder,  
I'm going to hunt the cutty wren said John the Rednose.  
And what will you do wi' it ? said Milder to Malder,  
And what will you do wi' it ? said Fessel to Foe,  
I'll put it in a box said Milder to Malder,  
I'll put it in a box said John the Rednose.  
etc.*

## **Commonwealth observance**

Boxing Day in the UK is traditionally a day for sporting activity, originally fox hunting, but in modern times football and horseracing.

In Canada, and indeed any other country that celebrates it, Boxing Day (in French, *lendemain de Noël*, "day after Christmas") is also observed as a public holiday, and is a day when stores sell their excess Christmas inventory at significantly reduced prices. Boxing Day has become so important for retailers that they often extend it into a "Boxing Week". This occurs similarly in Australia and New Zealand.

In Australia, a test match starting on December 26th is called the Boxing Day Test Match, and is played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground before the largest crowd of the summer.

## European observance

Boxing Day is a holiday of peculiarly British origin, but in most years it falls on the same day as the Feast of St. Stephen (St. Stephen's Day - 26th December).

In Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden, the 26th is known as the *Second day of Christmas* ("*der zweite Weihnachtsfeiertag*" in Germany, *Annandag Jul* — "the day after Christmas" — in Sweden, "*Tweede Kerstdag*" — "Second Christmasday" — in the Netherlands, "*Andre Juledag*" - "Second Christmasday" - in Norway.) and is also a public holiday.

In Ireland, the 26th December is known as [St Stephen's Day](#), or Wren's Day; in Austria it is called *Stefanitag*, in Italy *Santo Stefano*, and in Finland *tapaninpäivä* which also mean "St. Stephen's Day"; in Wales, it is known as *Gyl San Steffan* (St. Stephen's Holiday). In Catalonia, this day is known as *Sant Esteve*, Catalan for St. Stephen. A practice known as Hunt the Wren is still practiced by some in the Isle of Man, where people thrash out wrens from hedgerows. Traditionally they were killed and their feathers presented to households for good luck. In Germany the days between Christmas and new year are called "the days between the years" (*zwischen den Jahren*) and becoming more and more important for retailers to clear the unsold Christmas goods.

## Canadian observance

In Canada, Boxing Day is observed as a holiday, except for those in the retail business. Boxing Day and the days immediately following are when many retail stores sell their Christmas and retired model products by holding clearance sales. Some shoppers will line up for hours at night (sometimes before midnight and after midnight on December 26th) for retailers to open their doors. Retailers often open their stores earlier than usual, such as 6 or 7 am. Some retail companies internally refer to the sales week after Christmas as the "thirteenth month." (See [Boxing Week](#).)

Boxing Day, 2005, was the single-most highest economic transaction day ever in the history of Canadian commerce (according to Visa).

## Trivia

In the #1009 episode of M\*A\*S\*H, "'Twas the Day After Christmas", they celebrate Boxing Day by having the officers switch roles with the enlisted personnel.

## References

1. [^ Merriam Webster - 'Boxing Day'](#)
2. [^ Encyclopedia Britannica - 'Boxing Day'](#)
3. [^ American Heritage Dictionary, Fourth Edition - 'Boxing Day'](#)
4. [^ Oxford English Dictionary - 'Boxing Day'](#)

5. [^ BBC Radio 4 schedule, December 26 2004](#)
6. [^ Bank Holidays Act 1871 \(UK and Republic of Ireland\)](#)
7. [^ Banks and Bank Holidays Act \(NSW\) 1912 - Fourth Schedule](#)
8. [^ Holidays Act \(Qld\) 1983](#)
9. [^ DTI information on Bank and public holidays in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland](#). Note that only a 'substitute Bank Holiday in lieu of 26th December' is only possible in Northern Ireland, reflecting the legal difference in that St Stephen's Day does not automatically shift to the Monday in the same way as Boxing Day.

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## Boxing Week

**Boxing Week** is, at least, the six-day period that starts with [Boxing Day](#) and ends with New Year's Eve. It may also include a few days before [Christmas](#) and/or after New Year's Day. It is not strictly a week.

Many U.S., Canadian and (increasingly) UK retailers clear their inventory in Boxing Week specials because in many cases:

- Inventory must be counted using expensive labour some time in January.
- Depending on the state, province or municipality, they are often subject to a millage tax (similar to property taxes) on any inventory retained as of 1 January of each year (or 7 January/15 January in some tax jurisdictions).
- They are introducing new products in the new year.

This results in huge lineups at retailers.

Many products have a mail-in rebate to be used, a tactic used by manufacturers to clear their inventory.

Boxing Week coincides with the African festival of Kwanzaa.

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## Chrismahanukwanzakah

**Chrismahanukwanzakah** (sometimes spelt **Chrismahanakwanzaka**, **Chrismahanakwanza** or **Chrismahanakwanzika**) is a fictional holiday that was created by Virgin Mobile USA for a 2004 television commercial campaign. The holiday, in a similar vein to Festivus and Chrismukkah, was celebrated on December 13 of that year and combines [Christmas](#), Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa into one celebration. The commercial and the holiday itself is somewhat of a satirization of the effect of political correctness on the holiday season, which often is now seen as a secular series of celebrations rather than the formerly overt religious connotations of Christmas; as the song in the ad proclaims, "what matters most is camera phones for \$20 less."

Virgin Mobile has continued their trend of inventing cultural memes in the marketing campaigns with an entire religion called "Paygoism", which only has one tenet: restrictive cell phone contracts are a sin.

The Flash cartoon depicts hybrid characters, such as a multi-armed (Vishnu-like), turban-wearing [Santa](#), holding in his hands alternately dreidel and a gift box or an ear of corn (a symbol of Kwanzaa) and a small [Christmas tree](#), all whilst playing a sitar in sitting pose on a lotus flower. A female Rudolph exhibits menorah horns, a scarf in Kwanzaa colors, a golden pendant in the shape of Africa and a red forehead dot while sitting meditatively on an iridescent lotus flower in a cloud. The third character in the sardonic trio is a winged black man holding a large dreidel and wearing a golden comb a yin-yang in his hair and a sarong wrapped around his waist. Notably, the characters feature symbols from other religions in addition those mentioned or implied in the song.

Replacing the original Flash cartoon are three current Flash presentations that include two Jews singing about a non-pork meat dreidel that is eaten and eventually digested and a Hindu [Santa Claus](#) singing about his new camera phone that plays MP3s, as well as an angel singing a modified version of the Chrismahanukwanzakah song.

Virgin Mobile has been criticized for removing the "t" in [Christmas](#), yet including the subsequent "m" (i.e. spelling *Chrismas*). Some believe this to be a conscious attempt by Virgin at ensuring the word "Christ" not be spelled out in their advertising. Some believe Virgin Mobile would not want the term "Christ" in their advertising for secular reasons, while others assert that Virgin Mobile is avoiding criticism from Christian organizations for including "Christ" in the mishmash holiday.

The character of the fictional holiday is defined by the lyrics of the song (or "carol") that was played during Virgin's Chrismahanukwanzakah commercial:

*It's okay if you're a Muslim, a Christian or a Jew,  
It's okay if you're agnostic and you don't know what to do,  
An all-inclusive celebration,  
No contractual obligation,  
Happy Chrismahanukwanzakah to you (and pagans too!)  
In some ways we're all monkeys,  
Well, maybe just a smidgen,  
I'm a Scientologist,  
That's kind of a religion,  
Whose faith is the right one,  
It's anybody's guess,  
What matters most is camera phones for \$20 less.  
And there's never any hidden fees,  
Oh what a joyous day,  
No commitments means I'm proud to go both ways!  
Happy Chrismahanukwanzakah to you,  
This is gonna be the best Chrismahanukwanzakah ever!*

## See also

- [Chrismukkah](#)

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## Chrismukkah

**Chrismukkah** is the modern-day merging of the holidays of Christianity's [Christmas](#) and Judaism's Hanukkah as celebrated in interfaith households where one parent may be of Christian heritage and another parent of Jewish heritage. The word itself is a portmanteau arisen through the blending of the words "[Christmas](#)" and "Hanukkah". Chrismukkah is also celebrated as an ironic, alternative winter holiday, much like the *Seinfeld*-derived "Festivus."

The term has been used for many years by some in the Jewish community to comment on the commercialization of Hanukkah and the dominance of the commercialized Christmas in American culture. An exhibit at the Jewish Museum of Berlin (10/28/05- 1/28/06) called "Chrismukkah: Stories of Christmas and Hanukkah." sourced the origin of "Chrismukkah" to German-Jews in the late 1800s who called the holiday "Weihnukkah". Weihnachten is the German word for Christmas.

"A Christmas celebration with a tree, songs, and gifts became a symbol of being a part of German culture for many middle-class Jewish families in the 19th century. Jews celebrated Christmas as a secular "festival of the world around us" without religious meaning, or they transferred Christmas customs to the Hanukkah festival. This mixture was and is referred to as "Chrismukkah."

In the United States, Chrismukkah was the subject of a facetious press release that was widely circulated on joke web sites in the late 1990s. Chrismukkah gained pop culture notoriety on December 3, 2003, after being featured on the FOX television program *The O.C.*.

In 2004, Chrismukkah.com was launched by Ron and Michelle Gompertz, a Jewish-Christian intermarried couple in Bozeman, Montana. Their website took the fictional O.C. Chrismukkah and brought it into reality, selling humorous Chrismukkah greeting cards and dispensing detailed mythology about the fictional holiday. The Chrismukkah.com web site was widely credited with popularizing Chrismukkah to a non-television watching audience. Chrismukkah.com stirred up controversy in the Fall of 2004 when the New York Catholic League, the organization run by conservative pundit William Donahue, issued a national press release opposing Chrismukkah. In December, Chrismukkah was listed in *Time Magazine* as one of the "buzzwords" of the year. It was also reported in a Scottish newspaper, that Chrismukkah had been added to the authoritative "Chambers" dictionary. In 2005 Chrismukkah.com founder Ron Gompertz authored a humorous book of Chrismukkah recipes called *Chrismukkah! The Merry Mish-Mash Holiday Cookbook*. Gompertz's follow-up book, entitled "Chrismukkah - Everything You Need to Know to Celebrate the Hybrid Holiday" (published by Stewart, Tabori and Chang) comes out in October 2006. A rival book by Gersh Kuntzman, "Chrismukkah: The Official Guide to the World's Best-Loved Holiday" (Sasquatch Press), comes out at around the same time.

Chrismukkah exists amongst mixed non-religious families of Christian backgrounds and non-religious families of Jewish backgrounds. In this way a family can celebrate the external forms of these two disparate holidays simultaneously, although the theological message of

the two holidays are completely at odds. (Hanukkah is a holiday that celebrates the victory of religious Jews fighting against non-Jewish religious assimilation; Christmas is a holiday that celebrates the perceived fulfillment of Judaism by the arrival of the prophesied Messiah. Although it can still be argued that Christianity is a branch-off from Judaism, thus Christians celebrating Chrismukkah could be seen as celebrating their religious heritage.

Chrismukkah is advertised as if it were an established holiday by [Chrismukkah.com](http://Chrismukkah.com).

Chrismukkah has been described as "eight days of gifts followed by one day of lots of gifts" on the television show *The OC*.

Other names for the holiday include: **Chrismukah, Christmukah, Christmukkah, Hannumas, Chanumas** and **(Meppy) Christnukmah**.

A similarly named holiday called **Christmanukkah** was featured in *The Strangerhood*. Unlike Chrismukkah, Christmanukkah is twenty days long (twelve days of Christmas and another eight for Hanukkah), and all of the days are spent receiving gifts and eating till passing out.

It is believed that the spelling of the holiday, as "Chrismukkah," intentionally left out the "t" from Christmas, as so that Christian activists would not be enraged that Christ's name was proclaimed in such a holiday.

## See also

- [Hanukkah bush](#)
- [Chrismahanukwanzakah](#)

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## Christmas Eve



"The Christmas Eve" (1904-05), watercolor painting by the Swedish painter Carl Larsson (1853-1919)

**Christmas Eve**, December 24, the day before [Christmas Day](#), is treated to a greater or a lesser extent in most Christian societies as part of the [Christmas](#) festivities. Christmas Eve is the traditional day to set up the [Christmas tree](#), but as the Christmas season has been extended several weeks back (to Thanksgiving in the United States), many trees will have been set up for weeks.

In nearly all countries, Christmas Eve is a shortened business day. For example, (when it falls on a weekday) most financial markets close by early afternoon, and nearly all retail and commercial businesses are closed by late afternoon - typically between 4:00 and 6:00 pm.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the [Christmas](#) season liturgically begins on Christmas Eve. Unless it is a Sunday, the Mass of the Vigil is said in the late afternoon and evening hours of December 24. The [Christmas](#) season continues through until January 4, or if that be a Saturday, until January 5, when the Vigil of the [Epiphany](#) is celebrated.

Many Christians traditionally celebrate a midnight mass at midnight on Christmas Eve, which is held in churches throughout the world, marking the beginning of Christmas Day. Other churches hold a candlelight service which is typically held earlier in the evening. These often feature dramatizations of the Nativity. Large meals are common, often with turkey or ham as the main item. A traditional dish in Germany is roast carp. In Czech Republic and Slovakia it is a fish soup and breaded roasted carp with potato salad. In some parts of Eastern Europe such as Poland and Lithuania, a traditional meatless 12-dishes Christmas Eve Supper is served before opening gifts. A fish-based dinner is traditional in Italy.

When it is Christmas Eve or *La Nochebuena*, as it is known in Spain, there are two important traditions - attending [Christmas mass](#) and secondly, enjoying a meal with friends and family. There is a wide variety of typical foods one might find on plates across Spain on this particular night, and each region has its own distinct specialties. It is particularly common, however, to start the meal with a seafood dish such as prawns or salmon, followed by a bowl of hot, homemade soup. The main meal will commonly consist of roast lamb, or

seafood, such as cod or shellfish. For dessert, there is quite a spread of delicacies, among them are [turrón](#), a dessert made of honey, egg and almonds that is Arabic in origin

It is also seen as the night when [Santa Claus](#) or his international variants, make their rounds giving gifts to good children. In Czech Republic the Ježíšek (translated into English as 'Happy little Jesus') has no particular personification. Anyone has his/her own idea. In Italy presents are opened on the morning of Christmas Eve, while in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Portugal and Poland, Christmas presents are opened on that evening, and in the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia mostly on the morning of Christmas Day. In Finland Joulupukki personally meets children and gives presents in the evening of Christmas Eve. Latin American countries wait until 12:00 am to start opening presents. In most parts of Germany, Austria and Switzerland Christmas presents are opened in the evening of December 24th ('Bescherung'). In Spain and Latin America gifts are opened on the morning of January 6, [Epiphany day](#) ("Día de Los Reyes"). In Iceland [Christmas](#) starts at 6:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. Church bells ring at that time and people either sit down for holiday dinner at home or with closest family. After that they open gifts and spend the evening together. In many cultures, a festive dinner is traditionally served for the family and close friends in attendance. In Slavic countries, it is known as Wygilia, and being invited to attend a Wygilia dinner with a family is considered a high honor. Unless attendance is impossible or otherwise too impractical, or if the person has made other plans already, turning down such an invitation, or not showing up can be considered extremely rude.

In North America, there is a mixture of families opening gifts in the evening and, more commonly, on Christmas Day morning. In families where a divorce has occurred, children may spend one day with one part of the family, and the next with the other. In extended families where two branches of the family reside within a reasonable driving distance, many families may choose to spend Christmas Eve with the maternal side of the family and Christmas Day with the paternal side, or vice-versa. Most Christmas stories start or take place on this day.

In the Philippines, the sole predominantly Catholic Christian country in Asia, Christmas Eves are usually celebrated by attending the rooster's mass or Misa de Gallo. Misa de Gallo is the Holy Mass celebrated hours before the clock ticks 12 AM that signifies the arrival of December 25 Christmas Day. After going to mass, Filipino families usually hold a feast named Noche Buena to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. A great variety of food is eaten during this feast, an event that usually is done with great preparation. Foods being prepared include the famous Lechon, Quezo de Bola, Jamon, Roast Chicken (turkey did not gain much popularity in the Philippines), Barbecued meats, Pancit among many others. Despite the fact that some families are poor, they still find a way to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ through eating, family time and merry-making.

## **Declaration of Christmas Peace**

Declaration of Christmas Peace has been a tradition in Finland from the Middle Ages every year, except in 1939 due to the Winter War. The declaration takes place on the Old Great Square of Turku, Finland's official Christmas City and former capital, at noon on Christmas Eve. It is broadcast in Finnish radio (since 1935) and television and nowadays also in some foreign countries.

The declaration ceremony begins with the hymn *Jumala omni linnamme* (Martin Luther's *Ein` feste Burg ist unser Gott*) and continues with the Declaration of Christmas Peace read from a parchment roll:

"Tomorrow, God willing, is the graceful celebration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour; and thus is declared a peaceful Christmas time to all, by advising devotion and to behave otherwise quietly and peacefully, because he who breaks this peace and violates the peace of Christmas by any illegal or improper behaviour shall under aggravating circumstances be guilty and punished according to what the law and statutes prescribe for each and every offence separately. Finally, a joyous Christmas feast is wished to all inhabitants of the city."

Recently, there is also a declaration of Christmas peace for forest animals in many cities and municipalities, so there isn't hunting during Christmas.

### See also

- [Kk ios](#)
- [Wigilia](#)

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## Christmas Sunday

**Christmas Sunday** is the Sunday nearest to [Christmas Day](#).

In the United Kingdom, if [Christmas Day](#) falls on a Saturday, 26 December is correctly referred to as **Christmas Sunday**, and [Boxing Day](#) moves to 27 December. However, since 1999 common practice has seen 26 December called [Boxing Day](#) even when it falls on a Sunday.

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## Distaff day

**Distaff Day**, also called **Roc Day**, is 7 January, the day after the feast of the [Epiphany](#). In many European cultural traditions, women resumed their household work after the [twelve days of Christmas](#). The distaff, used in spinning, was the mediaeval symbol of women's work.

Some modern women's craft groups have taken up the celebration of Distaff day as part of their new year celebrations.

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## Epiphany

**Observed by:** Christians

**Type:** Christian

**Date:** 6 January

**Related to:** [Twelfth Night](#), [Christmas](#)

**Epiphany** (Greek:  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\gamma\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha$ , "the appearance; miraculous phenomenon") is a Christian feast intended to celebrate the 'shining forth' or revelation of God to mankind in human form, in the person of Jesus. The observance had its origins in the eastern Christian churches, and included the birth of Jesus; the [visit of the Magi](#), or [Wise Men](#) (traditionally named Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar) who arrived in Bethlehem; and all of Jesus' childhood events, up to his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. The feast was initially based on, and viewed as a fulfillment of, the Jewish Feast of Lights. This was fixed on January 6. Ancient Liturgies speak of *Illuminatio*, *Manifestatio*, *Declaratio* (Light, Manifest (show), Declare) cf St. Matthew's Gospel (iii, 13-17); St. Luke's (iii, 22); and St. John's (ii, 1-11); where the Baptism and Cana are dwelt upon. The Christian Churches have traditionally also talked of a *Revelation to the Gentiles* where the term 'Gentile' meant all non-Jewish peoples. The [Biblical Magi](#) represent the non-Jewish peoples of the world.

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## Epiphany in different Christian rites

### Western Christian Churches (Old World)

In the Western church, the feast of Christmas was established before that of Epiphany.

The early western Christian Church decided to celebrate [Christmas](#) on December 25. The East continued to treat January 6 as the day marking Jesus's birth. The west generally acknowledges a twelve-day festival, starting on December 25, and ending on January 6, known as the [twelve days of Christmas](#), although some Christian cultures, especially those of Latin America and some in Europe extend it to as many as forty days, ending on Candlemas, or February 2 (known as *Candelaria* in Spanish).

In the Western Churches it is associated principally with the [visit of the Magi](#) or [Wise Men](#)

Prior to 1970, the Roman Catholic Church (and prior to 1976, the Anglican churches) reckoned Epiphany as an eight-day feast, beginning on January 6 and continuing through the Octave of Epiphany, or January 13.

Many traditionalist Catholics continue to use this calendar, celebrating the feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday within the octave. On the Feast of the Epiphany itself, the priest,

wearing white vestments, will bless the Epiphany Water, frankincense, gold, and chalk. The chalk is used to write the initials of the three magi over the doors of churches and homes.

More recently, most Roman Catholics in the United States mark Epiphany on the Sunday after the first Saturday in January (before this the Sunday between January 1 and January 6 in years when there was one, was designated the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus), and most Catholics and Anglicans (along with many other Protestants) now formally end the Christmas season on the Sunday immediately following January 6, or, for American Catholics, the ensuing Monday in years when the Epiphany falls on January 7 or January 8. In either case, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord is observed on the latter day, after which the first installment of Ordinary Time begins. (But note that some Churches, such as the Anglican Catholic Church, and some groups of Roman Catholics, still use the pre-1970 calendar; for these bodies, Christmas still has twelve days and ends on January 5, and Epiphany is still celebrated on January 6 with an 8-day octave.)

The Irish call this day Little Christmas or Women's Christmas (Irish: *Nollaig na mBan*). In Rome, "Epiphania" was transformed into Befana, the great fair held at that season, when *sigillaria* of terracotta or baked pastry were sold (Macrobius I, x, xxiv; II, xlix).

In France, on Epiphany people eat the gâteau des Rois in Provence or the galette des Rois in the northern half of France and Belgium. This is a kind of king cake, with a trinket or a bean hidden inside. The person who gets the piece of cake with the trinket becomes king for a day.

In the United States Christmas usually ends the day after December 26 while other parts of the World are still celebrating Christmas up until the Epiphany or even beyond the Epiphany.

## Western Christian Churches Spain and Ibero-America

In Spain, Mexico, Cuba and some Latin American countries Epiphany day is called **El Día de los Reyes** (The Day of the Kings). The day when the Three Kings or Three Magi of the Bible arrived to worship and bring gifts to the baby Jesus after following a star in the heavens. This day is sometimes known as the *Día de los Tres Reyes Magos* (The day of the Three Magi) or **La Pascua de los Negros** (Holy Day of the Blackmen) in Chile, although the latter is rarely heard. In Spanish tradition, on the day of January 6th, the Kings: Melchor, Gaspar, and Balthazar, representing Europe, Arabia, and Africa, arrived on horse, camel and elephant, bringing respectively gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus.

In Mexico, it is traditional for children to leave their shoes out on the evening of January 6, sometimes filling them with hay for the camels, so that the Kings will be generous with their gifts. In Puerto Rico, it is also a tradition for children to fill a box with grass or hay and put it underneath their bed, for the same reasons. This is analogous to children leaving mince pies or cookies and milk out for Santa Claus in Western Europe. In some parts of northern Mexico the shoes are left under the Christmas tree with a letter to the Three Kings. In the afternoon or evening of the same day the ritual of the Rosca de Reyes is shared with family and friends. The Rosca is a type of sweet-bread made with orange blossom, water, and butter; decorated with candied fruit. Baked inside is a small doll representing the baby Jesus. The person who finds the doll in his piece of rosca must throw a party on February 2nd, Candelaria Day, offering tamales and atole (a hot sweet drink thickened with corn flour) to

the guests. Notably, in Spain, it is also known as Roscon; made with the same items, however, between the layers of bread, lies different flavoured whip cream. The 'Jesus' doll evolved into a small toy similar to a Kinder Surprise. The person gets the toy, is then responsible for the purchase of the Roscon the following year.

## Eastern Christian Churches

The first reference to Epiphany in the Eastern Church is a slighting remark by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis*, I, xxi, 45:

*"There are those, too, who over-curiously assign to the Birth of Our Saviour not only its year but its day..."*

Origen's list of festivals (in *Contra Celsum*, VIII, xxii) omits any reference to Epiphany. The first reference to an ecclesiastical feast of the Epiphany, in Ammianus Marcellinus (XXI:ii), is in 361.

Today in Eastern Orthodox churches, the emphasis at this feast is on the shining forth and revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and second person of the Holy Trinity at the time of his baptism. It is also celebrated because, according to tradition, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist marked the only occasion when all three persons of the Holy Trinity manifested their physical presence simultaneously to humanity: God the Father by speaking through the clouds, God the Son being baptized in the river, and God the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove overflying the scene. Usually called the Feast of the Theophany (Greek:  $\tau\omicron\mu\epsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ), it is one of the great feasts of the liturgical year; "theophany" is Greek for "God shining forth". In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, it is known as Timkat.

Orthodox Churches also perform a "Blessing of the Waters" on Epiphany Day: following Divine Liturgy, clerics proceed to the nearest body of water, be it a beach, a harbor, a quay, a river, a lake, a swimming pool, a water depot etc, and after a short ceremony they cast a cross in the water. If swimming is feasible on the spot, any number of volunteers may brave the cold winter waters and try to recover the cross. The person who gets the cross first swims back and returns it to the cleric, who then delivers a special blessing to the swimmer and their family and household. Certain such ceremonies have achieved particular prominence, such as the one held annually at Tarpon Springs, Florida.

## See also

- [Adoration of the Magi, Nativity scene](#)
- [Twelfth Night \(holiday\)](#)
- [Twelvetide](#)
- [Twelve Holy Days](#)
- [Christmas](#), Little Christmas

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## Handsel Monday

**Handsel Monday** is the first Monday of the year, particularly as used to be celebrated in Scotland and northern England. Among the rural population of Scotland, Auld Hansel Monday, is traditionally celebrated on the first Monday after the 12th of January.

The "handsel" refers to small tips and gifts of money that it was customary to give at the beginning of the first working week of a new year. In this respect it is somewhat similar to [Boxing Day](#).

*It is worth mentioning that one William Hunter, a collier (residing in the parish of Tillicoultry, in Clackmannanshire), was cured in the year 1738 of an inveterate rheumatism or gout, by drinking freely of new ale, full of harm or yeast. The poor man had been confined to his bed for a year and a half, having almost entirely lost the use of his limbs. On the evening of **Handsel Monday**, as it is called, some of his neighbours came to make merry with him. Though he could not rise, yet he always took his share of the ale, as it passed round the company, and in the end he became much intoxicated. The consequence was that he had the use of his limbs next morning, and was able to walk about. He lived more than twenty years after this, and never had the smallest return of his old complaint. —Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland, 1792, xv., note on p. 201.*

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## Hogmanay

**Hogmanay** (pronounced [ˈhTgmYÈneð] — with the main stress on the last syllable - hog-muh-NAY) is the Scots word for the last day of the year and is synonymous with the celebration of the New Year in the Scottish manner. Its official date is the 31 December. However this is normally only the start of a celebration which lasts through the night until the morning of the 1 January or, in many cases, 2 January.

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### Origins

The roots of Hogmanay reach back to the pagan celebration of the winter solstice. In Europe, this evolved into the ancient celebration of Saturnalia, a great Roman winter festival,

where people celebrated completely free of restraint and inhibition. The Vikings celebrated Yule, which later became the [Twelve Days of Christmas](#), or the "Daft Days" as they were sometimes called in Scotland. The winter festival went underground with the Protestant Reformation and ensuing years, but re-emerged near the end of the 17th century.

## Customs

There are many customs, both national and local, associated with Hogmanay. The most widespread national custom is the practice of first-footing which starts immediately after midnight. This involves being the first person to cross the threshold of a friend or neighbour and often involves the giving of symbolic gifts such as salt (less common today), coal, shortbread, whisky, and black bun (a fruit pudding) intended to bring different kinds of luck to the householder. Food and drink (as the gifts, and often Flies cemetery) are then given to the guests. This may go on throughout the early hours of the morning and well into the next day. The first-foot is supposed to set the luck for the rest of the year, so it is important that a suitable person does the job. A tall, handsome, and dark-haired man bearing a gift is strongly preferred. According to popular folklore, a man with dark hair was welcomed because he was assumed to be a fellow Scotsman; a blonde or red haired stranger was assumed to be an unwelcome Norseman.

An example of a local Hogmanay custom is the fireball swinging which takes place in Stonehaven, Kincardineshire in north-east Scotland. This involves local people making up balls of chicken wire, tar, paper and other flammable material to a diameter of about a metre. Each ball has 2 m of wire, chain or non-flammable rope attached. The balls are then each assigned to a swinger who swings the ball round and round their head and body by the rope while walking through the streets of Stonehaven from the harbour to the Sheriff court and back. At the end of the ceremony any fireballs which are still burning are cast into the harbour. Many people enjoy this display which is more impressive in the dark than it would be during the day. As a result large crowds flock to the town to see it.

The Hogmanay custom of singing Auld Lang Syne (a traditional poem reinterpreted by Robert Burns which was later set to music is commonly practiced), has become common in many countries. Outside Scotland the words are often corrupted with a common mistake being to sing "For the Sake of Auld Lang Syne" in the place of "For auld lang syne!"

## Presbyterian Influence

The Presbyterian Church generally disapproved of Hogmanay. The following quote is one of the first mentions of the holiday in official church records:

"It is ordinary among some plebeians in the South of Scotland to go about from door to door upon New-years Eve, crying Hagmane." *1692 Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence* (ed. 2) p82.

Until the 1960s, Hogmanay and Ne'erday (a contraction of "New Year's Day" in Scots dialect, according to the OED) in Scotland took the place of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in the rest of the UK. Although Christmas Day held its normal religious nature, the Presbyterian national church, the Church of Scotland, had discouraged its celebration for over 300 years. As a result Christmas Day was a normal working day in Scotland until the 1960s and even into the 1970s in some areas. The gift-giving, public holidays and feasting



associated with mid-winter were held between the 31 December and 2 January rather than between 24 December and 26 December.

With the fading of the Church's influence and the introduction of English cultural values via television and immigration, the transition to Christmas feasting was well-nigh complete by the 1980s. However, 1 January and 2 January remain public holidays in Scotland, despite the addition of Christmas Day and Boxing Day to the public holiday list, and Hogmanay still is associated with as much celebration as Christmas in Scotland. Most Scots still celebrate Ne'erday with a special dinner, usually steak pie.

## Ne'erday

When Ne'erday falls on a Sunday, 3 January becomes an additional public holiday in Scotland; when Ne'erday falls on a Saturday, both 3 January and 4 January will be public holidays in Scotland.

As in the rest of the world, the four largest Scottish cities, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee, hold all-night celebrations, as does Stirling. The Edinburgh Hogmanay celebrations are among the largest in the world, though in 2003-4 most of the organised events were cancelled at short notice due to very high winds.

## Handsel Day

Historically presents were given in Scotland on the first Monday of the New Year. This would be celebrated often by the employer giving his staff presents and parents giving children presents. A roast dinner would be eaten to celebrate the festival. Handsel was a word for gift box and hence Handsel Day. In modern Scotland this practice has died out.

## Etymology

The etymology of the word is obscure. It may have been introduced to Middle Scots through the Auld Alliance. In 1604 the custom was mentioned in the Elgin Records as *hagmonay*. The most satisfactory explanation is a derivation the from Northern French dialect word *huginane* or variants such as *huginono* and *hoguinettes*. Those being derived from 16th century Old French *aguillanneuf* which is either a gift given at New Year, a children's cry for such a gift or New Year's Eve itself. The second element would appear to be *l'an neuf* i.e. the New Year. Compare those to Norman *hoguinané* and the obsolete customs in Jersey of crying *ma hodgîngnole*, and in Guernsey of asking for an *oguinane*, for a New Year gift.

Other suggestions include:

- Scottish Gaelic *Og-Mhadainn/h'og maidne* ("new morning")
- The Gaelic expression "theacht mean oiche" ("the arrival of midnight", pronounced "heacht meawn eehe")
- Gaelic *ocht mean oiche* ("eighth midnight" (from Christmas))
- Old English *haleg monað* ("Holy Month")
- Manx word Hop-tu-Naa (31st October) - the Old Celtic new year.

- French *au gui mener* ("lead to the mistletoe"), *au gui l'an neuf* ("to the mistletoe the new year"), *(l')homme est né* ("(the) man is born")
- Flemish *hoog min dag* ("day of great love")
- Greek  $\pm^{31} \pm \frac{1}{4} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$  ("holy month")
- Spanish *aguinaldo* ("Christmas gift")

John Brand's *Popular Antiquities* (1859) describes a custom in Kent of *going a hodenning* at Christmas, going round the houses in procession and singing carols, accompanied by a sort of hobby-horse. See [wassail](#).

## References

- *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, Brand, London, 1859
- *Dictiounnaire Angllais-Guernesiaais*, de Garis, Chichester, 1982
- *Dictionnaire Jersiais-Français*, Le Maistre, Jersey, 1966
- *1692 Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*, Edinburgh
- *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, Edinburgh

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## HumanLight

**HumanLight** (sometimes *Humanlight*) is the Humanist counterpart to [Christmas](#) and other winter holidays. It is celebrated on December 23. Like Kwanzaa, HumanLight is a modern invention, created to provide a specifically Humanist counterpart to popular seasonal celebrations. It was established by the New Jersey Humanist Network in 2001.

Humanists have cast HumanLight as a celebration of "a Humanist's vision of a good future." They celebrate a positive approach to the coming new year, generally through the lens of Humanist (and particularly secular humanist) philosophy--secular as opposed to religious, and with an emphasis on reason and rationality. The December 23 date allows HumanLight to connect itself to the December holiday season without imposing itself over them, since many Humanists also celebrate other winter holidays.

HumanLight began with a single event in Verona, New Jersey, 2001. Since then, HumanLight has experienced much growth; in 2004, there were two dozen American events listed on the holiday's homepage, mostly on the East Coast and in the Midwest.

Organized HumanLight celebrations since its founding in 2001 have included guest speakers, candle-lighting ceremonies, musical and dramatic performances, dinners, dancing, and video presentations. As HumanLight seems designed to resist ritual or tradition, celebrations can vary from event to event or year to year.

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## Night of the Radishes

The **Night of the Radishes** (*Noche de Rabanos*) is a festival celebrated in the city of Oaxaca every December 23, the day before [Christmas Eve](#). Artists carve huge Mexican radishes into nativity scenes and pictures of Oaxacan life, and the city awards a prize to the best display.

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## Posadas

**Posadas** is a nine-day holiday beginning December 16 and ending December 24 ("Noche Buena" (Holy Night)).

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### Meaning

It represents the difficulties that Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin faced in finding room when travelling to Bethlehem. In it, groups of children (or sometimes adults) go from house to house singing a traditional song requesting lodging (*posada*). In each house, the owner responds with refusal (also in song), until they reach the designated site for the party, where the owner recognizes Mary and Joseph and allows them to come in. Latin American countries have a celebration party related to these days.

### Ritual

These Posadas are a re-enactment of the search by Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary for lodging prior to Jesus' birth. Typically, each family in a neighborhood will schedule a night for the Posada to be held at their home, starting on the 16th of December and finishing on the 24th.

Every home will have a Nativity scene, and the hosts of the Posada act as the innkeepers. The neighborhood children and adults are the "pilgrims" (Peregrinos), who have to request lodging by singing a traditional song about the pilgrims. All the "pilgrims" carry small lit candles in their hands, and four of the children carry small statues of Joseph leading a donkey, on which Mary is riding. The head of the procession will have a candle inside a paper lamp shade, or "Farolito" (little lantern).

The "Pilgrims" will symbolically ask for lodging at three different houses, but only the third one will allow them in. That will be the house where the Posada will be held for that evening. Once the "innkeepers" let them in, the group of guests comes into the home and kneels around the Nativity scene to pray (typically, the Rosary). This is followed by the singing of traditional Christmas songs and a party for the children, including a piñata.

Traditionally, it is expected to meet all the invitees in a previous procession.

## Mexico

In particular, in Mexico the tradition consists in a group of hosts (may be one family of one home or may be a number of families in the neighborhood) that prepare a typical dinner to "host" the rest of the neighbors (usually a block or section of the neighborhood). Each one of the nine days a different family (or group of families) offer to be the hosts, so that the whole neighborhood or section participates during the nine days.

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## Purification of the Virgin

**Candlemas** (Russian: !@5B5=85 >A?>4=5, *Sretenye Gospodnye*, Spanish: *Candelaria*) is a Christian feast commemorating the purification of the Virgin Mary and the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple.

Since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, this title of the feast has been suppressed in favor of the Presentation of the Lord with references to candles and the purification of Mary de-emphasized in favor of the Prophecy of Simeon.

Candlemas was the last feast in the Christian year that was dated by reference to [Christmas](#); subsequent moveable feasts are calculated with reference to [Easter](#). Prior to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Candlemas marked the end of the Christmas and [Epiphany](#) season, although February 2 can fall during the pre-Lenten season (causing omission of "Alleluia" in the liturgy) if Easter falls early enough. The present calendar has the Saturday before the Baptism of the Lord as the final day of the Christmas liturgical season.

"Down with the rosemary, and so

Down with the bays and mistletoe ;

Down with the holly, ivy, all,

Wherewith ye dress'd the [Christmas](#) Hall"

— Robert Herrick (1591–1674), "Ceremony upon Candlemas Eve"

The term "Candlemas" refers to the practice found in former Roman Missals whereby a priest on February 2 would bless the candles for use during the year (said candles must be of beeswax). This practice has generally fallen out of use.

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## Date

The feast of the **Purification of the Virgin** is observed by the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches on February 15 in the Julian Calendar, which, from 1900 to 2100, falls on February 2 in the Gregorian calendar. This feast is known as the **Presentation of the Lord** in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. In Eastern Orthodoxy it is known as **The Feast of the Presentation of our Lord and Savior in the Temple**, and in Anglican Churches it is known by various names, including **The Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in The Temple** (ECUSA), **Presentation of Our Lord** (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), **The Presentation of Christ in the Temple**, and **The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (Anglican Church of Canada), and **The Presentation of Christ in the Temple** (Church of England and Anglican Church of Australia).

The date of Candlemas is established by the date set for the Nativity of Jesus, for it comes 40 days afterwards. Under Mosaic law, a mother who had given birth to a man-child was considered unclean for seven days; moreover she was to remain for three and thirty days "in the blood of her purification." Candlemas therefore corresponds to the day on which Mary, according to Jewish law (see Leviticus 12:2–8), should have attended a ceremony of ritual purification. The gospel of Luke 2:22–39 relates that Mary was purified according to the religious law, followed by Jesus's presentation in the Jerusalem temple, and this explains the formal names given to the festival.

In the West, the date of Christmas is now fixed at December 25, and the Presentation therefore falls on the following February 2. The dating is identical among Orthodox Christians, except that the ecclesiastic December 25 of most Orthodox Christians falls on January 7 of the civil calendar due to a theological dispute related to the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, meaning that most Orthodox Christians celebrate the feast on February 15. In the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Feast, called "The Coming of the Son of God into the Temple", is also celebrated on February 15.

## History

The earliest reference to a celebration was when the intrepid pilgrim nun Egeria, travelling in the Holy Land, 381–384 AD, reported that February 14 was a day solemnly kept in Jerusalem with a procession to Constantine's Basilica of the Resurrection, a homily on Luke 2:22 (which makes the occasion perfectly clear), and a Liturgy. This so-called *Itinerarium Peregrinatio* ("Pilgrimage Itinerary") of Egeria does not offer a name for the Feast, however. The date February 14 proves that in Jerusalem at that time, Christ's birth was celebrated on January 6, [Epiphany](#). Egeria writes for her beloved fellow nuns at home:

"XXVI The fortieth day after the Epiphany is undoubtedly celebrated here with the very highest honour, for on that day there is a procession, in which all take part, in the Anastasis, and all things are done in their order with the greatest joy, just as at Easter. All the priests, and after them the bishop, preach, always taking for their subject that part of the Gospel where Joseph and Mary brought the Lord into the Temple on the fortieth day, and Symeon and Anna the prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, saw Him, treating of the words which they spake when they saw the Lord, and of that offering which His parents made. And when everything that is customary has been done in order, the sacrament is celebrated, and the dismissal takes place."

In 542 the feast was established throughout the Eastern Empire by Justinian. In Rome, the feast appears in the Gelasian Sacramentary, a manuscript collection of the 7th and 8th centuries associated with Pope Gelasius I, but with many interpolations and some forgeries. There it carries for the first time the new title of the feast of Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Late in time though it may be, Candlemas is still the most ancient of all the festivals in honor of the Virgin Mary. The date of the feast in Rome was moved forward to February 2, since during the late 4th century the Roman feast of Christ's nativity been introduced as December 25.

Though modern laypeople picture Candlemas as an important feast throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, in fact it spread slowly in the West; it is not found in the Lectionary of Silos (650) nor in the Calendar (731–741) of Sainte-Geneviève of Paris.

The 10th century Benedictional of St. Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester, has a formula used for blessing the candles. Candlemas did become important enough to find its way into the secular calendar. It was the traditional day to remove the cattle from the hay meadows, and from the field that was to be ploughed and sown that spring. References to it are common in later medieval and early Modern literature; Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is recorded as having its first performance on Candlemas Day, 1602. It remains one of the Scottish quarter days, at which debts are paid and law courts are in session.

Candlemas is chiefly observed today in the Orthodox, and Anglican traditions. In the Orthodox traditions it is the day on which believers bring beeswax candles to their local church to be blessed for use in the church or in the home. Since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, this title of the feast was dropped in favor of the Presentation of the Lord with the purification of Mary and the blessing of candles de-emphasized in favor of a focus on the prophecy of Simeon.

## **Relation to non-Christian celebrations**

Candlemas depends on the date for Christmas: Candlemas follows 40 days after. Thus there is no independent meaningfulness to the date of Candlemas. It is plausible that some features of Pagan observances were incorporated into Christian rites of Candlemas, when the celebration of Candlemas spread to the north and west of Europe.

Modern neopagans have argued that Candlemas is a Christianization of the Celtic Sabbat of Imbolc, which was celebrated in pre-Christian Europe (and especially the British Isles) at about the same time of year. This festival marked the mid-way point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. The term "Imbolc" translates as either "in milk" or "in the belly," and marked the birth and nursing of the spring lambs as a sign of the first stirrings of spring in the middle of winter.

It may also have been celebrated with the lighting of candles, as slightly longer days begin to be noticeable at this time of year. In Irish homes, there were many rituals centered around welcoming Brigid (a Goddess, some of whose rituals and legends became attached to the Christian Saint Brigid, who was the Abbess of Kildare) into the home at this time. The exact date may have varied from place to place based on local tradition, but since Imbolc was marked as a midpoint between solstice and equinox it was not likely affected by the lunar year. Imbolc is celebrated by modern pagans on February 1.

Christians currently counter-argue there is no evidence that this festival was widespread, and there is no reason to suppose that an Anglo-Celtic festival would have influenced the practice of the Roman church after the late 4th century.

Secular historians have sometimes argued that the Roman church introduced Candlemas celebrations in opposition to the Pagan feast of Lupercalia; many Christian texts deny this. The Catholic Encyclopædia is definite in its rejection of this argument: "The feast was certainly not introduced by Pope Gelasius to suppress the excesses of the Lupercalia," (referencing J.P. Migne, *Missale Gothicum*, 691). The 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica agrees: the association with Gelasius "has led some to suppose that it was ordained by Pope Gelasius I in 492 as a counter-attraction to the pagan Lupercalia; but for this there is no warrant." Since the two festivals are both concerned with the ritual purification of women, not all historians are convinced that the connection is purely coincidental. Gelasius' certainly did write a treatise against Lupercalia, and this still exists; see Lupercalia. Nevertheless it is clear that Candlemas merely follows by forty days whatever day is celebrated as Christ's Nativity.

The tradition that some modern Christians and Pagans observe, of lighting a candle in each window (or in each room), is not the origin of the name "Candlemas", which instead refers to a blessing of candles.

## Traditions and superstitions

As a poem by Robert Herrick records, the eve of Candlemas was the day on which Christmas decorations of greenery were removed from people's homes; for traces of berries, holly and so forth will bring death among the congregation before another year is out. Another tradition holds that anyone who hears funeral bells tolling on Candlemas will soon hear of the death of a close friend or relative; each toll of the bell represents a day that will pass before the unfortunate news is learned.

In the British Isles, good weather at Candlemas is taken to indicate severe winter weather later. It is also the date that bears emerge from hibernation to inspect the weather as well as wolves, who if they choose to return to their lairs on this day is interpreted as meaning severe weather will continue for another forty days at least. In the United States and Canada, Candlemas evolved into Groundhog Day celebrated on the same date.

The earliest American reference to Groundhog Day can be found at the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center at Franklin and Marshall College:

*February 4, 1841 — from Morgantown, Berks County (Pennsylvania) storekeeper James Morris' diary ... "Last Tuesday, the 2nd, was Candlemas day, the day on which, according to the Germans, the Groundhog peeps out of his winter quarters and if he sees his shadow he pops back for another six weeks nap, but if the day be cloudy he remains out, as the weather is to be moderate."*<sup>[1]</sup>

In France, Candlemas (French: *La Chandeleur*) is celebrated with crêpes, which must be eaten only after eight p.m. If the cook can flip a crêpe while holding a coin in the other hand, the family is assured of prosperity throughout the coming year.

In Mexico, Candlemas (Spanish: *Día de La Candelaria*) is celebrated with [Tamales](#). Tradition indicates that on January 5, the night before Three Kings Day (the Epiphany), whoever gets one or more of the few plastic or metal dolls (originally coins) buried within the Rosca de Reyes bread must throw a party on Candlemas.



Sailors are often reluctant to set sail on Candlemas Day, believing that any voyage begun then will end in disaster — given the frequency of severe storms in February, this is not entirely without sense.

## References

- *Catholic Encyclopedia* "Candlemas", F. G. Holweck
- *Encyclopedia Britannica*
- *Food and Feast in Medieval England*, P. W. Hammond, ISBN 0-7509-0992-7

*This article incorporates text from the Encyclopædia Britannica Eleventh Edition, a publication now in the public domain.*

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## Sol Invictus



Coin of Emperor Probus, circa 280, with Sol Invictus riding a quadriga, with legend SOLI INVICTO, "to the undefeated Sun". Note how the Emperor (on the left) wears a radiated solar crown, worn also by the god (to the right).

**Sol Invictus** ("the undefeated Sun") or, more fully, **Deus Sol Invictus** ("the undefeated sun god") was a religious title applied to at least three distinct divinities during the later Roman Empire; El Gabal, Mithras, and Sol.

Unlike the earlier, agrarian cult of Sol Indiges ("the native sun" or "the invoked sun" - the etymology and meaning of the word "indiges" is disputed), the title *Deus Sol Invictus* was formed by analogy with the imperial titulature *pius felix invictus* ("dutiful, fortunate, unconquered").

A **festival of the birth of the Unconquered Sun** (or *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*) was celebrated when the duration of daylight first begins to increase after the winter solstice,—the "rebirth" of the sun.

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## Elagabalus

The title first gained prominence under the emperor Elagabalus, who abortively attempted to impose the worship of El Gabal, the sun-god of his native city Emesa in Syria. With the emperor's death in 222, however, this religion ceased, though emperors continued to be portrayed on coinage with the radiant sun-crown, for close to a century.

In the second instance, the title *invictus* was applied to Mithras in private inscriptions by devotees. It also appears applied to Mars.

## Aurelian

The Roman *gens Aurelia* was associated with the cult of Sol. After his victories in the East, the emperor Aurelian introduced an official cult of Sol Invictus, making the sun-god the premier divinity of the empire, and wearing his radiated crown himself. He founded a college of pontifices, and dedicated a temple to Sol Invictus in 274. It is possible that he created the festival called dies natalis Solis Invicti, "birthday of the undefeated Sun", which is recorded in 354 as celebrated on the 25th December; but no earlier reference to it exists.

## Constantine

Emperors up to Constantine portrayed Sol Invictus on their official coinage, with the legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI, thus claiming the Unconquered Sun as a companion to the Emperor. During the reign of Constantine the coinage ceases to be pagan in 325, and Sol Invictus disappears with the rest at that date.

Constantine decreed (March 7, 321) *dies Solis* — day of the sun, from which "sunday" — as the Roman day of rest [CJ3.12.2]:

*On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not suitable for grain-sowing or vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.*

The religion of Sol Invictus continued to be part of the state religion until paganism was abolished by the decree of Theodosius I decree on February 27, 390.

## Sol Invictus and Christianity

Christianity adopted some of the attributes of the Sol Invictus religion, as apparent in the first examples of Christian iconography, depicting Jesus Christ with solar attributes such as the radiated crown or, in a few instances, a solar chariot.

Sol Invictus had been adopted by the Church of Rome, as evidenced by Christ depicted as Apollo-Helios in a mausoleum discovered under St. Peter's Basilica and dated to 250<sup>[1]</sup>, and, from the beginning of the third century, "Sun of Justice" was used as a title of Christ<sup>[2]</sup>.

"Besides, the Sol Invictus had been adopted by the Christians in a Christian sense, as demonstrated in the Christ as Apollo-Helios in a mausoleum (c. 250) discovered beneath St. Peter's in the Vatican"<sup>[3]</sup>, [see image to the right] and, "indeed, from the beginning of the 3d century "Sun of Justice" appears as a title of Christ"<sup>[4]</sup>.

The date for [Christmas](#) may also bear a relation to the sun worship. According to the Syriac bishop Jacob Bar-Salibi, writing in the twelfth century:

"It was a custom of the Pagans to celebrate on the same 25 December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and revelries the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnised on that day." (cited in "Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries", Ramsay MacMullen. Yale:1997, p155)

Catholic Encyclopedia: Christmas states: "The well-known solar feast, however, of Natalis Invicti, celebrated on 25 December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date."

Christianity designated Sunday as the "Lord's Day" and the day of rest, rather than Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. See also Constantine I and Christianity.

## Notes

1. [^](#) *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Constantine the Great", 1967.
2. [^](#) *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Christmas".
3. [^](#) "Constantine the Great" , *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967
4. [^](#) *ibid.*, "Christmas"

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## St. Stephen's Day

**Also called:** Feast of St Stephen

**Observed by:** Christians

**Type:** Christian

**Date:** 26 December

**Related to:** [Boxing Day](#)

**St Stephen's Day**, or the **Feast of St Stephen**, is a Christian saint's day celebrated on 26 December in the Western Church and 27 December in the Eastern Church. Churches which adhere to the Julian calendar mark St Stephen's Day in January, although from their

perspective they are celebrating it in December. It commemorates St Stephen, the first Christian martyr or protomartyr.

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## Around the world

The day is a public holiday in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Finland, Catalonia, Croatia, Republika Srpska, and Romania. St. Stephen's Day is also the "feast of Stephen" referred to in the Christmas carol Good King Wenceslas. In Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, [Boxing Day](#) is celebrated instead, which in most years falls on the same day (Boxing Day falls on the first non-Sunday after Christmas, either 26 or 27 December).

## Ireland

In Irish it is called *Lá Fhéile Stiofán* or *Lá an Dreoilín* — the latter translates literally as another English name used, the Day of the Wren or Wren's Day. When used in this context, 'wren' is oftentimes pronounced 'ran'. This name alludes to several legends, including those found in Ireland linking episodes in the life of Jesus to the wren. In parts of Ireland persons carrying either an effigy of a wren, or an actual caged wren, travel from house to house playing music, singing and dancing. Depending on which region of the country, they are called Wrenboys, Mummers or Strawboys. A Mummer's Festival is held at this time every year in the village of New Inn, Co. Galway. St Stephen's Day is also a popular day for visiting family members. A popular rhyme, known to many Irish children and sung at each house visited by the mummers goes as follows:

*The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,  
On St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze,  
Up with the penny and down with the pan,  
Give us a penny to bury the wren.*

## Catalonia

In Catalonia it is called "Sant Esteve" and is a bank holiday, but not in the whole country of Spain.

## Republika Srpska

St. Stephen is the patron saint of the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and St. Stephen's Day is celebrated as the Day of the Republika Srpska. It falls on January 9

by the Gregorian calendar (the standard international calendar), as the Serb Orthodox Church adheres to the Julian calendar.

## See also

- St. Stephen's Day in Hungary is observed on August 20, the day on which the allegedly sacred relics of Stephen I of Hungary were transferred to the city of Buda. This day is the ultimate public holiday in Hungary. Stephen I, or 'Stephanus' as he was named in Latin by Pope Sylvester II, was originally a pagan chieftain's son answering to the name 'Vajk'. He gouged out the eyes and poured boiling lead into the ears of his arch rival (Vasoly) and was awarded a crown by the pope for forcing catholicism onto the Hungarian people. The converted king was canonized by Pope Gregory VII in AD 1083 and has since been referred to as St Stephen of Hungary. Under communism St. Stephen's Day was referred to by the Hungarians as 'The celebration of the new bread - the end of the harvest'.

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# Twelfth Night

**Observed by:** Christians

**Type:** Christian

**Date:** 5 January/6 January

**Observances:** Christmas decorations taken down

**Related to:** [Epiphany](#)

**Twelfth Night** is a holiday in some branches of Christianity marking the coming of the [Epiphany](#), or **Twelfth Day**, and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the evening of the 5 January, preceding Twelfth Day, the eve of the Epiphany".

In some traditions it is taken to mean the evening of the Twelfth Day itself, the 6 January. This apparent difference has arisen probably due to the old custom of treating sunset as the beginning of the following day. Therefore Twelfth Night would have been considered as occurring on the twelfth day, though in present day custom it is the previous day.

The celebration of Epiphany, the [adoration of the Magi](#), is marked in some cultures by the exchange of gifts, and Twelfth Night, as the eve of Epiphany, takes on a similar significance to [Christmas Eve](#).

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## Origins and history

In Tudor England, the Twelfth Night marked the end of a winter festival that started on All Hallows Eve--which some now celebrate as Halloween. A King or Lord of Misrule would be appointed to run the Christmas festivities, and the Twelfth Night was the end of his period of rule. The common theme was that the normal order of things was reversed. This Lord of Misrule tradition can be traced back to pre-Christian European festivals such as the Celtic festival of Samhain and the Ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia.

## Traditions

Twelfth Night is when all Christmas Decorations should be removed so as not to bring bad luck upon the home. If decorations are not removed on Twelfth Night, they should stay up all year.

In some countries, the Twelfth Night marks the start of the Carnival season, which lasts through Mardi Gras. In some places such as New Orleans, Louisiana, the night of January 6 with the first Carnival celebrations is called Twelfth Night. In some places, Twelfth Night celebrations include food traditions such as the king cake or tortell.

## Influence on Literature

Shakespeare's play Twelfth Night, or What You Will was written to be performed as a Twelfth Night entertainment and first performed at Middle Temple Hall, London during the Twelfth Night celebrations of 1602 at the culmination of the celebrations, which was then at Candlemas, February 2. The play has many elements that are reversed in the tradition of Twelfth Night, such as a woman Viola dressing as a man, and a servant Malvolio imagining that he can become a nobleman.

## Modern Esotericism

According to esoteric and astrological interpretations of Christmas, the "Twelve Holy Days" start on December 26, the day following Christmas "holy day", and end on January 6; therefore the night of January 6 is regarded as the Twelfth Night, and is held to have been the time when the "Rite of Baptism" was performed in early Christianity <sup>[1]</sup>, and of course the date of Epiphany itself.

## See also

- [Christmas](#)
- [Christmas season](#)
- [Twelvetide](#)
- [Twelve Holy Days](#)

- [Biblical Magi, Nativity scene](#)
- [Christmas carol](#)

## References

1. [Helene, Corinne. \*New Age Bible Interpretation, Vol. VII Mystery of the Christos: The Twelve Holy Days\*. ISBN 0-933963-07-6 ; period starting December 26th \(after \[Christmas\]\(#\) day\) to January 6th \(\[Twelfth Night\]\(#\)\).](#)

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# Twelve Days of Christmas

The **Twelve Days of Christmas** and the associated evenings of those twelve days (**Twelve-tide**), are the festive days from the evening after [Christmas Day](#) (December 25) through [Epiphany](#) on (January 6). December 26 ([St. Stephen's Day](#)) is the first day of Christmas, then December 27 is the second day of Christmas, and so on until January 6 which is the 12th day of Christmas. Christmas Day, December 25, is therefore not one of the twelve days of Christmas. The associated evenings of the twelve days begin on the evening before the specified day. Thus, the first-night is December 25–26, and [Twelfth Night](#) is January 5–6.

"The Twelve Days of Christmas" (Roud 68) is also the title of a popular English [Christmas carol](#) which enumerates a series of grandiose gifts given on each day of the festival.

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## Festival

These are the twelve days beginning on night of Christmas (December 25) and ending on the day of 6 January as Epiphany begins on (January 6). In the Middle Ages this period was one of continuous feasting and merrymaking, which climaxed on [Twelfth Night](#), the traditional end of the [Christmas season](#).

During the twelve days of Christmas, traditional roles were often relaxed, masters waited on their servants, men were allowed to dress as women, and women as men. Often a Lord of Misrule was chosen to lead the Christmas revels. Some of these traditions were adapted from

older, pagan customs, including the Roman Saturnalia. Some also have an echo in modern day pantomime where traditionally authority is mocked and the principal male lead is played by a woman, while the leading older female character, or 'Dame' is played by a man.

Some people give gifts, feast and otherwise celebrate on each of the twelve days rather than just on one day at Christmas.

## Christmas carol

The date of the song's first performance is not known, though it was used in European and Scandinavian traditions as early as the 16th century.

## Structure and lyrics

"Twelve Days of Christmas" is a cumulative song, meaning that each verse is built on top of the previous verses. There are twelve verses, each describing a gift given by "my true love" on one of the twelve days of Christmas.

The first verse runs:

*On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me  
A partridge in a pear tree.*

The second verse:

*On the second day of Christmas, my true love sent to me  
Two turtle doves  
and a partridge in a pear tree.*

and so on. The last verse is:

*On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me  
Twelve drummers drumming,  
eleven pipers piping,  
ten lords a-leaping,  
nine ladies dancing,  
eight maids a-milking,  
seven swans a-swimming,  
six geese a-laying,  
five gold rings;  
four calling birds,  
three French hens,  
two turtle doves  
and a partridge in a pear tree.*

The time signature of this song is not constant, unlike most popular music. The introductory lines, such as "On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me", are made up of two 4/4 bars, while most of the lines naming off gifts receive one 3/4 bar per gift with the exception of "Five golden rings", which receives two 4/4 bars, "Two turtle doves" getting a 4/4 bar with "And a" on its 4th beat and "Partridge in a pear tree" getting an entire 4/4 bar of music. In most versions, a 4/4 bar of music immediately follows "Partridge in a pear tree." "On the" is found in that bar on the 4th (pickup) beat for the next verse.

There are many variations of this song in which the objects are arranged in a different order (for example — twelve lords a-leaping, eleven ladies dancing, ten pipers piping, nine drummers drumming). There are also many parodies of this song, or modernized versions.

One way to interpret the lyrics of this song is that on each new day, all the gifts are given. This makes the total number of gifts given (counting 12 partridges, 22 turtle doves...) equal to 364, one fewer than the number of days in a year. There are 376 gifts if you count the pear tree as a separate gift from the partridge that resides in it. Of the 364 total items, 184 of them are birds.

## Symbolic interpretation

Some Christians arbitrarily assign symbolism to the gifts in the song. One of the most common versions of these assigned meanings is:

- The 'partridge in a pear tree' is Jesus (see Luke 13:34)
- The 'two turtle doves' are the Old and New Testaments
- The 'three French hens' are the three virtues, faith, hope, and love, or, alternatively, a symbol of the holy Trinity.
- The 'four calling birds' are the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; or their Gospels
- 'Five gold rings' are the first five books of the Bible, or the Pentateuch
- 'Six geese a-laying' refer to the six days of the Creation
- 'Seven swans a-swimming' are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- 'Eight maids a-milking' are the eight Beatitudes
- 'Nine ladies dancing' are the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit
- 'Ten lords a-leaping' are the Ten Commandments
- 'Eleven pipers piping' are the eleven faithful Apostles
- 'Twelve drummers drumming' are the twelve doctrines in the Apostles' Creed

This interpretation is usually taught with a story that English Catholics, suffering persecution in the 16th century, wrote the song with these hidden meanings.

However, this ignores the fact that 16th century English Catholics were being persecuted by people who were also Christians, and none of the doctrines supposedly taught by the song were points of controversy. The urban legend debunking site Snopes.com argues that

"[t]here is no substantive evidence to demonstrate that the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was created or used as a secret means of preserving tenets of the Catholic faith, or that this claim is anything but a fanciful modern day speculation..."

## Standard variations

Sometimes "gave to me" is used instead of "sent to me"; also "five golden rings" is sometimes "five gold rings". Some argue that "gold" is correct and that "golden" is not. But because "gold" requires stretching into two syllables, the word "golden" seems to fit better. Additionally, some interpreters of the song argue that the five rings refer to coloring around the neck of birds such as pheasants, not jewelry.

The line *four calling birds* is an Americanization of the traditional English wording *four colly birds*, and in some places, such as Australia, the variation *calling* is supplanting the



original. Colly is a dialect word meaning *black* and refers to the European blackbird *Turdus merula*.

The line *four calling birds* in some versions is *four coiled birds*.

The line *nine ladies dancing* in some versions is *nine ladies waiting*.

As well, the last four verses are sometimes interchanged, so that one version of the song may have nine pipers, ten drummers, eleven ladies, twelve lords, or any other combination.

Straight versions of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* has been covered by many popular modern artists and groups.

## Parodies

Many parodies of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" have been written, perhaps more than for any other Christmas song, as its simple list of gifts encourages imaginative substitutes.

The version performed by the Canadian comedy team Bob & Doug McKenzie replaces the first gift with "a beer" then "a beer, in a tree" (awkwardly metered to match the traditional "a partridge in a pear tree"), substituting the other gifts on the list with other stereotypically Canadian items such as 8 comic books (after complaining about the length of the song they skip to day twelve but talk over the part that lists days 12 through 9), 7 packs of smokes, 6 packs of two-four (case of beer with 24 bottles or cans), 5 golden tuques, 4 pounds of back bacon, 3 french toasts, 2 turtlenecks, and a beer in a tree.

In his 1959 satire of the over-commercialization of Christmas, called "Green Chri\$tma\$", Stan Freberg invented several short and different variations of the song, including:

- "Five tubeless tires"
- "Four quarts of gin"
- "Three cigars"
- "Two cigarettes"
- "And some hair tonic on a pear tree"

In the 11th episode of the first season of the TV show *Scrubs*, a parody relates the reasons why doctors try to avoid being on-call on Christmas eve:

- 12 beaten children
- 11 drive-by shootings
- 10 frozen homeless
- 9 amputations
- 8 burn victims
- 7 strangled shoppers
- 6 random knifings
- 5 suicides
- 4 beaten wives
- 3 OD's
- 2 shattered skulls
- and a drunk who drove into a tree

In the 1960s, comedy songwriter Allan Sherman composed and sang (along with a choir) the "12 Gifts of Christmas", and although it may seem strange, on the 12th day of Christmas he decided to *exchange* the eleven previous gifts:

- "Automatic vegetable slicer that works when you see it on television, but not when you get it home";  
"Chromium combination manicure scissors and cigarette lighter";  
"Pair of teakwood shower clogs";  
"Indoor plastic birdbath";  
"pink satin pillow that says 'San Diego' with fringe all around it";  
"Hammered aluminum nutcracker";  
"Statue of a [naked] lady with a clock where her stomach ought to be";  
"Simulated alligator wallet";  
"Calendar book with the name of my insurance man";  
"Green polka dot pajamas";  
and a "Japanese transistor radio", a Nakashuma, the Mark IV model (that's the one that's discontinued), in a leatherette case with holes in it so you can listen right through the case, and a wire with a thing on one end that you can stick in your ear, and a thing on the other end that you can't stick anywhere because it's bent.

The version by The Muppets with John Denver is done with the traditional words, but with embellishments, notably by Miss Piggy, breaking up the "straightness" of the presentation.

Jeff Foxworthy's "Redneck" version has become the most popular parody version heard on American radio as of 2004. The gifts include a 12-pack of Bud, 11 rasslin' tickets, a 10 of Copenhagen, 9 years probation, 8 table dancers, 7 packs of Red Man, 6 cans of SPAM, 5 flannel shirts, 4 big mud tires, 3 shotgun shells, 2 hunting dogs, and some parts to a Mustang GT. Unlike most other versions of the song, Foxworthy's does not feature the characteristic numerical verses.

Scottish Comedian Bill Barclay recorded a version (sometimes titled "The 12 drinks of Christmas"). Each verse contains a stronger drink, with Bill becoming more and more drunk as the song progresses.

A popular parody in the United States, The Twelve Pains of Christmas (performed by Bob Rivers and his comedy troupe), does away with numbering altogether and instead lists some of the activities that drive Americans crazy during the Christmas season from lighting, to gift-giving, to dealing with family members, even singing carols. Also included are these things: finding a christmas tree, rigging up the lights, hangovers, sending christmas cards, five months of bills, facing my inlaws, charities and others

On the Sesame Street Christmas CD, the gang improvises:

Cookie Monster gets well, a cookie, Elmo gets 2 baby frogs, an Anything Girl gets 3 footballs(?), Grover gets 4 wooly bears, Bert gets 5 argyle socks, Ernie gets 6 rubber ducks, Oscar gets 7 trashcans, The Count gets 8 counts, Big Bird gets 9 lbs. of birdseed, Telly demands 10 triangles, Harry Monster wants 11 broken buildings and Snuffy can't remember what he got.

Blizzard Entertainment released a free MP3 for its fans with the voice actors from StarCraft singing about different items in that video game. The list for that version:

- "A brand new Scv";  
• "2 Terran Wraiths";

- "3 Marines";
- "4 Hydralisks";
- "5 new born Queens";
- "6 Zealots fighting";
- "7 Zerglings swarming";
- "8 Archons burning";
- "9 Battlecruisers";
- "10 UltraLisks";
- "11 Science Vessels";
- "12 Arbiters"

However in their MP3, the Archons only say "8 Archons burning" when they are introduced and on the 12 verse. On the 9th verse they say "Power Overwhelming." on the 10th verse they say "Terror All-Consuming" and on the 11th verse they say "I Hate All This Singing."

At Garfield.com, Garfield receives a partridge in a pear tree, 2 teddy bears, 3 fruitcakes, 4 jelly rolls, 5 million presents, 6 dogs a-kicking, 7 bunny slippers, 8 plates of pasta, 9 spiders wacking, 10 cups of coffee, 11 hairballs hacking, and 12 mice a-dancing.

The Yobs, a British punk band, sing a perverted version featuring, amongst other obscenities, "5 #####", 2 blow up dolls and a vibrator with a battery.

In a version "The Twelve Days after Christmas", the singer and his true love "had a fight". As a result, the singer spent the song describing how the gifts were disposed of by giving them away or (for most of the non-human gifts, which were sent back Collect, minus one drummer) killed.

In the Discworld novel Hogfather, Mustrum Ridcully sings what seems to be "The Twelve Days of Hogswatch", clearly a rather less unilateral song: *"On the second day of Hogswatch I... sent my true love back A nasty little letter, hah, yes, indeed, and a partridge in a pear tree."*

In the 2006 album A Twisted Christmas, Twisted Sister covered the song. It goes as follow:

On my heavy metal Christmas my true love gave to me,

- "12 Silver crosses";
- "11 Black mascaras";
- "10 Pairs of platforms";
- "9 Tattered t-shirts";
- "8 Pentagrams";
- "7 Leather jackets";
- "6 Cans of hairspray";
- "5 Skull earrings";
- "4 Quarts of Jack";
- "3 Studded belts";
- "2 Pairs of spandex pants";
- "And a tattoo of Ozzy!";

## Cost

As a tongue-in-cheek economic indicator, each year economists will compute the cost for all the gifts mentioned in the song. For 2005, the survey by PNC Advisors showed a 9.50% increase over 2004. It breaks down to:

- One Partridge in a Pear Tree: \$104.99 (\$15.00 Partridge, \$89.99 Pear Tree)
- Two Turtle Doves: \$40.00 (\$20.00 each)
- Three French Hens: \$45.00 (\$15.00 each)
- Four Calling Birds: \$399.96 (\$99.99 each)
- Five Gold Rings: \$325.00 (\$65.00 each)
- Six Geese-a-Laying: \$300.00 (\$50.00 each)
- Seven Swans-a-Swimming: \$4,200.00 (\$600.00 each)
- Eight Maids-a-Milking: \$41.20 (\$5.15 each)
- Nine Ladies Dancing: \$4,576.14 (\$508.46 each)
- 10 Lords-a-Leaping: \$4,039.08 (\$403.91 each)
- 11 Pipers Piping: \$2,053.20 (\$186.66 each)
- 12 Drummers Drumming: \$2,224.30 (\$185.36 each)

Total Christmas Price Index: \$18,348.87

"Core" index, excluding swans: \$14,148.87

True cost of Christmas in song: \$72,608.02 (including 364 total gifts)

## References

- [Christmas](#). *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Retrieved on December 22, 2005. See especially the subhead *Popular Merrymaking* under *Liturgy and Custom*.
- [True cost of Christmas: \\$18,348.87](#). *MSN Money*. Retrieved on December 22, 2005.
- Hoh, John L., Jr. *12 Days of Christmas: A Carol Catechism*. Vancouver, BC: Suite 101 eBooks, 2001 (<http://www.north46.com/twelvedaysofchristmas.html>)

Categories: [Christmas carols](#) | [Christmas-linked holidays](#)

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## Twelve Holy Days

The **Twelve Holy Days** is the holy period, from December 26th to January 6th, in the esoteric and astrological interpretation of the [Christmas](#) season.

The night between the 24th and 25th of December is considered to be the most "holy night", when the sun (the "Light of the World") commences its journey from the south to the north. On the night when he commences his northward journey the zodiacal sign virgo, the celestial virgin (the "Queen of Heaven"), stands upon the eastern horizon at midnight (thus he is "born of a virgin" without other intermediary, hence, "immaculately conceived.") <sup>[1]</sup>

On December 25th the Christ enters the heart of earth and the planet is swept by powerful solstitial radiations, becoming enveloped by the light of the archangelic Christ and therefore Christmas is considered the most "holy day" of the year. From December 26th to January 6th the twelve zodiacal hierarquies work upon the earth and its life forms, along

with the Christ light which continues throughout the twelve holy days. The night of January 6th is regarded as the [Twelfth Night](#), the time when the "Rite of Baptism" was performed in early Christianity. This period of twelve-day interval, between Christmas and Twelfth Night, is regarded as the spiritual heart of the year to follow and is termed the year's "Holy of Holies" <sup>[2]</sup>.

### The Twelve Holy Days

Holy Day	Zodiacal Hierarchy	Solar month	Body center	Disciple	Bible meditation
December 26	Aries	March 20 to April 21	the head	James, brother of John (pioneer, first disciple)	<i>Behold, I make all things new.- Revelation 21:5</i>
December 27	Taurus	April 21 to May 22	the throat	Andrew (humility)	<i>He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.-I John 4: 16</i>
December 28	Gemini	May 22 to June 22	the hands	Thomas (his doubts, natural to the mortal mind, were transcended)	<i>Be still, and know that I am God. - Psalm 46:10</i>
December 29	Cancer	June 22 to July 23	the solar plexus	Nathaniel (a mystic in whom there is no guile)	<i>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.-I John 1:7</i>
December 30	Leo	July 23 to August 24	the heart	Judas (personality must always wane that spirit may wax strong)	<i>Love is the fulfilling of the law.-Romans 13: 10</i>
December 31	Virgo	August 24 to September 23	the intestinal tract	James the Just, brother of Jude and Simon (purity of character and consecration to selfless service)	<i>But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. Matthew 23:11</i>
January 1	Libra	September 23 to October 24	the adrenal glands	Jude (a minister of the beautiful)	<i>Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.-John 8: 32</i>
January 2	Scorpio	October 24 to November 23	the generative system	John the Beloved (transmutation is the keynote)	<i>Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.- Matthew 5:8</i>
January 3	Sagittarius	November 23 to December 22	the sacral plexus	Philip (a spiritualized mind)	<i>Ye, are the light -of the world.-Matthew 5:14</i>

January 4	Capricorn	December 22 to January 20	the knees	Simon brother of James and Jude (his one desire was to serve the Lord)	<i>Let the Christ be formed in you.- Galatians 4:19</i>
January 5	Aquarius	January 20 to February 19	the two lower limbs	Matthew (he renounced all worldly possessions)	<i>Ye are my friends.- John 15:4</i>
January 6	Pisces	February 19 to March 20	the feet	Peter (through his faith, became the Rock of Initiation on which the church was founded)	<i>So God created man in his own image. Genesis 1: 27</i>

## See also

- [Christmas](#)
- [Twelve Days of Christmas](#)
- [Twelfth Night \(holiday\)](#)
- [Adoration of the Magi](#)
- [Nativity scene](#)

## References

1. [\[](#) Heindel, Max (1920). *The Mystical Interpretation of Christmas*. ISBN 0-911274-65-0.
2. [\[](#) Helene, Corinne (1954). *New Age Bible Interpretation, Vol. VII Mystery of the Christos: The Twelve Holy Days*. ISBN 0-933963-07-6.

Categories: [Christmas-linked holidays](#)

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## Winterval

**Winterval** is a portmanteau word coined to describe all festivities taking place around the middle of winter. It is a fusion of the words winter and festival and was intended to be an alternate description that embraces the mix of Neopagan (Winter solstice, Yule), Jewish (Hanukkah), Afro-Caribbean (Kwanzaa), and other holidays that take place during the winter months, rather than just the originally Christian holidays of [Christmas](#), [Boxing Day](#), and New Year's Day.

## Contents

- [1 Birmingham controversy](#)

- 2 See also

## **Birmingham controversy**

The word came to prominence in 1998 when Birmingham City Council in the United Kingdom used it as a title to encompass the three month collection of multi-faith and secular events, running from October to January, and including Diwali, bonfire night, the new year and other seasonal events as well as Christmas itself.

Elements of the popular press, spurred on by the then Bishop of Birmingham, the Rt Rev Mark Santer attempted to portray it as an attempt to give the Christmas festivities a politically correct flavour. The bishop stated:

*"I wonder what madness is in store for us this Christmas? I confess I laughed out loud when our city council came out with Winterval as a way of not talking about Christmas. No doubt it was a well-meaning attempt not to offend, not to exclude, not to say anything at all".*

However, the council's response was:

*"Birmingham City Council wants people to celebrate Christmas. Christmas is the very heart of Winterval; far from not talking about Christmas the events within Winterval and the publicity material for it are covered in Christmas greetings and traditional images, including angels and carol singers".*

The council had drawn particular attention to the city's Anglican cathedral during the festival by placing [Christmas lights](#) in the trees around the building, and the greeting "Happy Christmas Birmingham" hung in large lights over the main entrance to the Council House as it had done in every other year.

## **See also**

- [Christmahanukwanzaka](#)

Categories: [Christmas-linked holidays](#)

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# Christmas music

A **Christmas song** is a song which is normally sung during the time period leading up to, and sometimes shortly past, [Christmas](#) day, and usually has lyrical content addressing the holiday, the winter season, or both. These songs recognizably fall into several different groupings, depending on both the content and age of the songs.

Songs which are traditional, even some without a specific religious context, are often called [Christmas carols](#). Songs with religious reference are also called Christmas hymns. For example, the Christian-centered "O Come All Ye Faithful" and the totally secular "Deck the Hall(s)" could easily both be found on Christmas-based record albums by choirs and other church-sounding artists.

Some songs of more recent vintage, often introduced in films, are specifically about Christmas, but are typically not overtly religious, and are not typically classified as Christmas carols. The archetypal example is 1942's "White Christmas", although many other holiday songs have become perennial favorites, such as Gene Autry's "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer".

A significant subset of the secular songs are regarded as "Christmas" songs due to the time of year they are most often sung, despite never mentioning anything about Christmas or even about [Santa Claus](#). These songs include traditional favorites such as "Winter Wonderland". These songs fall into the generic "winter holiday" classification, as they carry no religious connotation at all.

Another subset of the popular holiday songs, apart from the more sincere ones, are the many parodies or twists on existing songs, which are usually classified as "Novelty songs". They range from the cuteness of "The Chipmunk Song", by Alvin and the Chipmunks, to the Cold War gallows humor of "Christmas at Ground Zero" and the morbid humor of "The Night Santa Went Crazy", both by "Weird Al" Yankovic.

Some songs have little relationship to Christmas, but are hyped up over the period. Each year, record companies compete for the Christmas number one single spot, usually, but not always, with a Christmas-related song. This is parodied in the film *Love Actually*, whereby an artist records a cover version of a song and adds a Christmas twist to it, all the time admitting that it is "rubbish".

In the UK Cliff Richard is famed for his many attempts, with some success, to get the Christmas number one single.

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- [1 List of Christmas songs](#)
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  - [1.2 Best known by one particular artist](#)
  - [1.3 Not intended as a Christmas song](#)
- [2 Christmas albums](#)
  - [2.1 Christmas songs introduced in movies and other popular media](#)
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- [4 German language Christmas songs](#)



- [5 Occitan language Christmas songs](#)
- [6 Swedish language Christmas songs](#)

## List of Christmas songs

### General Christmas songs

The following songs are well known for being performed by more than one different artists:

- "Blue Christmas" – Introduced by Ernest Tubb in 1949, though most famously recorded by Elvis Presley.  
"The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)" (1946) (composed by Mel Torme and first performed by Nat King Cole)  
"The First Noel"  
"Frosty the Snowman" (1950) – popularized by Gene Autry. Countless artists have recorded it in the years since, perhaps the most famous likely being Jimmy Durante, who recorded the version for the television special of the same name.  
"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" – introduced by Judy Garland in the film Meet Me In St. Louis; covered by many, including Luther Vandross, James Taylor and Vince Gill.  
"It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas"  
"It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" covered by many including Daryl Hall & John Oates  
"Jingle Bells"  
"Jingle Bell Rock" – best-known version is by Bobby Helms, released in 1957. Hall and Oates also did a version.  
"Joy to the World" – covered by various artists which include Mariah Carey.  
"Let it Snow"  
"Little Drummer Boy" – The 1958 version by the Harry Simeone Chorale is the standard.  
"Mary's Boy Child" – Harry Belafonte in 1957, Boney M in 1978 and re-released in 2005 by G4/Robin Gibb as "Mary's Boy Child/First of May".  
"The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" – introduced by Andy Williams in 1963  
"Merry Christmas Darling" – Introduced by The Carpenters in 1978 (on their album, A Christmas Portrait).  
"Mistletoe and Holly" – co-written and popularised by Frank Sinatra  
"O Holy Night" – covered by several artists including Kelly Clarkson and Christina Aguilera  
"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" (1949).  
"Santa Looked a Lot Like Daddy" – Introduced by Buck Owens in 1965; re-popularized by Garth Brooks in 1992.  
"Silent Night" – popularised by Frank Sinatra  
"Twelve Days of Christmas"

"Up On the House Top" by Benjamin Hanby and Kimberley Locke  
"We Wish You a Merry Christmas"  
"White Christmas" (first performed by Bing Crosby in the 1942 musical Holiday Inn)

### **Best known by one particular artist**

Below is an incomplete list of songs that are best known for being created and/or performed by one particular artist:

- "2000 Miles" – The Pretenders  
"25th December" – Everything But The Girl (1994)  
"8 Days of Christmas" – Destiny's Child 2001  
"All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth" – Spike Jones and the City Slickers (1948)  
"All I Want for Christmas Is You" – Mariah Carey (1994)  
"All Alone On Christmas" – Darlene Love (1963, 1992 and 1994)  
"Alone on Christmas Day" – Travis  
"A Minnesota Snowfall" – Christmas Around the World – Bradley Joseph (2000)  
"Another Lonely Christmas" – Prince (1984)  
"Another Rock And Roll Christmas" – Gary Glitter (1984)  
"Candy Cane Children" – The White Stripes (2002)  
"Cashing In on Christmas" – Bad News (1992)  
"The Chanukah Song (Parts I and II)" – Adam Sandler (1994-2002)  
"The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late)" – Alvin and the Chipmunks (1958)  
"Christmas" – King Diamond (2003)  
"Christmas" – The Who (1969)  
"Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)" – Darlene Love  
"Christmas Blues" – Dean Martin  
"Christmas Eve (Sarajevo 12/24)" (aka "Carol of the Bells") – Trans-Siberian Orchestra (1996)  
"A Christmas Kiss" – Daniel O'Donnell (1999)  
"Christmas in Dixie" – Alabama, introduced in 1982. Lead singer Randy Owen re-recorded the song with Kenny Chesney in 2003  
"Christmas in Hollis" – Run-DMC  
"Christmas in My Hometown" – Charley Pride, issued in 1970. A different song of the same name was recorded by Sonny James in the late-1960s, and covered by Travis Tritt in 1992  
"Christmas is All Around" – Bill Nighy (2003)  
"Christmas Is Now Drawing Near" – Coil (1998)  
"Christmas Must be Tonight" – The Band (1977)  
"Christmas on 45" – Holly and the Ivys (1981)  
"Christmas Round At Ours" – Girls Aloud (2005)  
"Christmas Shoes" – NewSong (2002)  
"Christmas Time" – Bryan Adams (1985)

"Christmas Time (Don't Let The Bells End)" – The Darkness (2003)  
"Christmas with the Devil" – Spinal Tap (1992)  
"Christmas Wrapping" – The Waitresses (1981)  
"Christmastime" – Billy Corgan  
"Cruise into Christmas Medley" – Jane McDonald (1998)  
"December Will Be Magic Again" – Kate Bush  
"Do They Know It's Christmas?" – released three times by Band Aid (1984),  
Band Aid II (1989) and Band Aid 20 (2004)  
"Do You Hear What I Hear?" Bing Crosby (1963) – Whitney Houston  
"Driving Home For Christmas (EP)" – Chris Rea  
"Fairytale of New York" – The Pogues featuring Kirsty MacColl (1987)  
"Far Away on Christmas Day" – Christmas Around the World – Bradley Joseph  
(2000)  
"Father Christmas" – The Kinks (1977)  
"Feliz Navidad" – Jose Feliciano (1968)  
"Fifty Grand for Christmas" – Paul Holt (2004)  
"Give Love On Christmas Day" – Jackson 5 and Solid Harmonie  
"Give U One 4 Christmas" – Hot Pantz (2005)  
"Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" Elmo and Patsy (1983)  
"Grown-Up Christmas List" Amy Grant in 1992, Monica in 2000, and Kelly  
Clarkson in 2002  
"Happy Xmas (War Is Over)" – John Lennon & Yoko Ono (1972), later covered  
by Melissa Etheridge, and most recently by The Idols in 2003  
"Hard Candy Christmas" – Dolly Parton (1982)  
"Have a Cheeky Christmas" – The Cheeky Girls (2003)  
"Have a Funky, Funky Christmas" – New Kids On the Block  
"A Heart To Hold You" – Keane (2004)  
"Here Comes Santa Claus" – Gene Autry (1947) (famously remade by Elvis  
Presley)  
"Hey Santa" – Carnie Wilson & Wendy Wilson  
"Holly Jolly Christmas" – Burl Ives (1964)  
"Home For Christmas" – Daryl Hall & John Oates (2006)  
"(There's No Place Like) Home For the Holidays" – Perry Como (1954)  
"I Believe in Father Christmas" – Emerson, Lake & Palmer  
"I Celebrate the Day" – Relient K (2003)  
"I Hate Christmas Parties" – Matthew Thiessen and the Earthquakes (2003)  
"I Hate Fuckin' Christmas" The Rugburns (1995)  
"I Hope I Sell a Lot of Records at Christmastime" – Princess Superstar (2000)  
"I Only Want You For Christmas" – Alan Jackson (1991)  
"I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" – Jimmy Boyd (1952)  
"I Wish It Could Be A Wombling Merry Christmas Everyday" – The Wombles  
with Roy Wood (2000)  
"I Won't Be Home For Christmas" – Blink-182 (2001)  
"I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day" – Wizzard (1973), A\*Teens & Girls  
Aloud

"I'll Be Home for Christmas" – Bing Crosby (1943)  
"It doesn't often snow at Christmas" – Pet Shop Boys (1997)  
"It's Christmas All Over the World" – Sheena Easton (1987)  
"It's Christmas Time All Over the World" Sammy Davis Jr.(1963)  
"Itz The Holidaze" Westside Connection  
"Kentucky Homemade Christmas" – Kenny Rogers (1981)  
"Last Christmas" – Wham! (1984), later covered by Whigfield in 1995 and Jimmy Eat World in 2003.  
"Leroy the Redneck Reindeer" – Joe Diffie  
"Let it Snow" – Vaughn Monroe (1945), Dean Martin  
"Let's Light the Christmas Tree" – Ruby Wright (1957)  
"Light of the Stable" – Emmylou Harris, introduced in 1976; includes backing vocals by Dolly Parton and Linda Ronstadt  
"Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth" – David Bowie & Bing Crosby  
"Little Saint Nick" – The Beach Boys (covered by Sugar Ray)  
"Lonely Christmas" Bobby Vee (1963)  
"Lonely This Christmas" – Mud (1974)  
"Marshmellow World" Brenda Lee(1964); later popularized by Dean Martin (1966)  
"Merry Merry Christmas Baby" Dodie Stevens (1960)  
"Merry Christmas Baby" Chuck Berry(1958), Bruce Springsteen also has a popular version.  
"Merry Christmas Darling" – Carpenters (1978)  
"Merry Christmas Everyone" – Shakin' Stevens (1985)  
"Merry Christmas Santa Claus (You're a Lovely Guy)" – Max Headroom (1986)  
"Merry Fucking Christmas" – Denis Leary  
"Merry Mothafuckin' Christmas" – Eazy E  
"Merry Twistmas" Marcells (1961)  
"Merry Xmas Everybody" – Slade (1973), Dexy's Midnight Runners in (1982), Steps and then Tony Christie in (2005)  
"Mistletoe and Holly" – co-written and popularised by Frank Sinatra  
"Mistletoe & Wine" – Cliff Richard (1988)  
"Mistress For Christmas" AC/DC  
"Mr. Hankey the Christmas Poo" – South Park (1999)  
"My Only Wish (This Year)" – Britney Spears (2000)  
"Naughty Christmas (Goblin in the Office)" – Fat Les (1998)  
"New Kids Got Run Over By A Reindeer" – Z100 Portland (Oregon) (1990)  
"Nuttin' For Christmas" – Art Mooney & His Orchestra (1955)  
"No Child Should Ever Cry on Christmas" – Daryl Hall & John Oates (2006)  
"No Presents for Christmas" – King Diamond (1986)  
"Oi to the World" – The Vandals (1996) and No Doubt  
"An Old Christmas Card" – Jim Reeves (1963)  
"Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy" - David Bowie And Bing Crosby  
"Perfect Christmas" – S Club 7  
"Please Come Home for Christmas" – Jon Bon Jovi (1994)

"Pretty Paper" – Roy Orbison (1963)  
"Proper Crimbo" – Bo' Selecta! (2003)  
"Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" – Brenda Lee (1958)  
"Rudi the Red Nose Reindeer" – Musical Youth  
"Run Run Rudolph" – Chuck Berry (1958)  
"Santa Baby" – Eartha Kitt (1953), later covered by Kylie Minogue and Madonna, among others  
"Santa Claus and Popcorn" – Merle Haggard, introduced in 1973  
"Santa Claus is Coming to Town" – Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, Perry Como and later by Jackson 5 (1970), Bruce Springsteen  
"Santa Claus is Thumbing to Town" – Relient K (2001)  
"Saviour's Day" – Cliff Richard (1990)  
"Senor Santa Claus" – Jim Reeves (1964)  
"Silver Bells" Bing Crosby & Carole Richards (1950)  
"Six White Boomers" – Rolf Harris  
"Sleigh Ride" – written & popularized by Leroy Anderson & His Orchestra (1948), Johnny Mathis w/ Percy Faith & His Orchestra (1958), S Club Juniors & Hilary Duff  
"The Sound Of Christmas" Ramsey Lewis Trio  
"Step Into Christmas" – Elton John (1973)  
"Snoopy's Christmas" – The Royal Guardsmen (1967)  
"Someday at Christmas" – Stevie Wonder  
"Thank God For Kids" – The Oak Ridge Boys (1982)  
"Thank God It's Christmas" – Queen  
"Thanks For Christmas" – Three Wise Men (AKA XTC)  
"That Holiday Feeling" – Steve Lawrence & Eydie Gorme  
"The Greatest Gift Of All" – Kenny Rogers & Dolly Parton (1984)  
"The Lights And Buzz" – Jack's Mannequin (2005)  
"The Man Who Would Be Santa" – Matt Scannell, Vertical Horizon  
"The Night Before Christmas" – Carly Simon (1994)  
"The Old Man's Back In Town" – Garth Brooks (1992)  
"'Til Santa's Gone (Milk and Cookies)" – Clint Black (1991)  
"Twistin' Bells" Santo & Johnny (1959)  
"Under the Tree" – The Waterbabies (2005)  
"Upon a Christmas Night" – Michael Learns To Rock  
"What Christmas Means to Me" – Stevie Wonder  
"White Christmas" – Bing Crosby (1942)  
"Who Would Imagine A King" – Whitney Houston (1996)  
"Winter Wonderland" – Perry Como (1946), The Andrews Sisters (1946), Johnny Mathis (1958)  
"Winter Wonderland/Sleigh Ride" – a medley of the two Christmas favorites by Dolly Parton (1984)  
"Wombling Merry Christmas" – The Wombles (1974)  
"Wonderful Christmas Time" – Paul McCartney (1982)  
"Xmas At K-Mart" – Root Boy Slim And The Sex Change Band With The

Rootettes

"Xmas Ketchup Song" – Las Ketchup

"Yule Shoot Your Eye Out" – Fall Out Boy

Radio personality Bob Rivers has written countless Christmas parodies, most notably The Chimney Song and The Twelve Pains of Christmas, for his line of albums entitled Twisted Christmas.

## Not intended as a Christmas song

Some songs are frequently associated with Christmas because of the time they were released rather than explicit references to the holiday. They are sometimes given a Christmas feel by adding sleigh bells or by recording a Christmas video.

- "Can we Fix it?" – Bob the Builder (2000)
- "Dear Mr. Jesus" – PowerSource from their *Shelter From The Storm* album. It is sung by a 9 year old girl named Sharon Batts. Richard Klender wrote it in 1985. The song is about child abuse awareness and it has nothing to do with Christmas. Connie Bradley, Director, ASCAP, on April 11, 1988 said that this song was one of the, "most requested songs in the history of radio," (it is still highly requested every holiday season).
- "If We Make it Through December," Merle Haggard (1973). The song is a lament of a father who loses his job at the factory just as the holidays are approaching. Depressed over his predicament during what normally should be a "happy time of year," he observes that his little girl "don't understand why Daddy can't afford no Christmas cheer." The song reached No. 1 on Billboard magazine's Hot Country Singles chart on December 22, 1973 ... just in time for Christmas.
- "Last Christmas" – Wham! (1984) (reached no. 2 in the UK christmas charts, beaten by Band Aid- Feed the World) George Michael originally wrote the song "Last Easter", the record company asked him to change it to Christmas as it would catch a larger audience
- "Mad World" – Michael Andrews featuring Gary Jules (2003) (this Tears for Fears cover is included on several Christmas compilation albums. It was Christmas Number One in the UK in 2003, ahead of the livelier "Christmas Time (Don't Let The Bells End)" by British rock band The Darkness.)
- "My Favorite Things" from the Rodgers and Hammerstein The Sound of Music. US radio stations that played Christmas music played various versions of this show tune, relating "favorite things" to Christmas gifts.
- "The Power of Love" – Frankie Goes to Hollywood (1984) (was released close to Christmas 1984, and was thus given a Nativity themed video and album cover. The song could be argued to be more suited to Halloween, with its references to vampires.)
- "Put a Little Love in Your Heart" by Annie Lennox with Al Green was on the soundtrack for the movie Scrooged, a modernized retelling of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. The promotional video for the song featured scenes from the movie and Christmas-related visuals.

- "Somethin' Stupid" – Robbie Williams and Nicole Kidman (2001) (reached no. 1 in the UK christmas charts, therefore commonly associated with christmas)
- "Sound of the Underground" – Girls Aloud (2002) (reached no. 1 in the UK christmas charts, therefore commonly associated with christmas)
- "Stay Another Day" – East 17 (1994) (added sleigh bells)
- "Stop The Cavalry" – Jona Lewie (1980) (released in late November when the record company spotted the line "Wish I was at home for Christmas")

## Christmas albums

Some artists record albums dedicated to Christmas or winter. These collections often contain covers of well-known Christmas songs or carols.

- Christmas Favorites – Nat King Cole
- 8 Days of Christmas – Destiny's Child
- A Christmas Gift To You From Phil Spector
- A Very Special Christmas compilation series – Various Artists
- A Toolbox Christmas-Woody Phillips Your favorite carols performed on your favorite hand and power tools.
- A Victorian Christmas-Robin Petrie Instrumental carols for harp, hammered dulcimer and strings.
- A Victorian Noýl-Robin Petrie European arranged for dulcimer, harp, piano and strings.
- Ashanti's Christmas – Ashanti
- Barenaked for the Holidays – Barenaked Ladies
- The Beach Boys' Christmas Album – The Beach Boys
- A Charlie Brown Christmas - soundtrack album of the classic TV special.
- Chemistry – Girls Aloud (An special limited edition version of the album released contained a Xmas album)
- Chicago 25: The Christmas Album – Chicago
- Christmas Around the World – Bradley Joseph
- Christmas Eve and Other Stories, The Christmas Attic, and The Lost Christmas Eve – Trans-Siberian Orchestra (containing traditional and original Christmas songs)
- Christmas Is Almost Here Again – Carly Simon (2003)
- Christmas Island (album) – Jimmy Buffett (1996)
- Christmas Lullaby-Kim Robertson Solo celtic harp
- Christmas Peace (along with other variations) – Elvis Presley
- Cliff at Christmas – Cliff Richard
- Deck the Halls, Bruise Your Hand – Relient K
- Ding! Dong! Songs for Christmas - Vol. III – Sufjan Stevens
- Hark! Songs for Christmas - Vol. II – Sufjan Stevens
- Ho, Ho, Ho – RuPaul
- Holy Night – Kevin Max
- Iceland – All About Eve

The Jethro Tull Christmas Album – Jethro Tull  
The John Legend Collection – John Legend  
Jingle All The Way – Crash Test Dummies  
Joy - A Holiday Collection – Jewel  
Merry Christmas – Mariah Carey  
My Kind of Christmas – Christina Aguilera  
"Naughty Or Nice" – 3LW  
Noel! Songs for Christmas - Vol. I – Sufjan Stevens  
One Wish: The Holiday Album – Whitney Houston  
Rejoyce: The Christmas Album – Jessica Simpson  
Strings of Christmas – Russell Sheard  
Taste Of Christmas – Various Artists  
When My Heart Finds Christmas – Harry Connick, Jr.

Some bands produce Christmas albums exclusively for their fan clubs, including The Beatles who first released such an album in 1963 [\[1\]](#). Also popular are the Various Artists collections such as The Best Christmas Album in the World...Ever! & Now That's What I Call Christmas!.

### **Christmas songs introduced in movies and other popular media**

- "Star of Bethlehem" and "Somewhere in My Memory" – John Williams from the Home Alone soundtrack.  
"White Christmas" – Irving Berlin from Holiday Inn  
"Happy Holidays" - also from Holiday Inn  
"We Need a Little Christmas" - by Jerry Herman, from the Broadway play, Mame  
"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" – from Meet Me in St. Louis  
"What's This?" - Danny Elfman, Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas  
"Where Are You, Christmas?" - Faith Hill, How the Grinch Stole Christmas!  
James Brown's Funky Christmas

### **French language Christmas songs**

- "Entre le bœuf et l'âne gris"  
"Douce nuit, sainte nuit" (Silent Night)  
"Il est né le divin enfant"  
"La Marche des rois"  
"Les Anges dans nos campagnes"  
"Minuit chrétien"  
"Noël nouvelet"  
"Venez divin Messie"  
"Peuple fidèle" (Adeste fideles)  
"Dans une étable obscure"  
"C'est le jour de la Noël"



"Bergers, l'enfant sommeille"  
"Noël de la paix" (Ô divin enfançon)

## German language Christmas songs

German language Christmas carols tend to be less blitheful and more ceremonious than English ones:

- "Es ist ein Ros entsprungen" (Lo How a Rose 'Ere Blooming)  
"Heiligste Nacht" (Dutch song!)  
"Ihr Kinderlein kommet"  
"Menschen, die ihr wart verloren"  
"O du fröhliche"  
"Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht" (Silent Night)  
"Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her"  
"Zu Bethlehem geboren"  
"Alle Jahre wieder"  
"Kling Glöckchen"  
"Lasst uns froh und munter sein"  
"Leise rieselt der Schnee"  
"Morgen, Kinder, wird's was geben"  
"O Tannenbaum" (O Christmas Tree)  
"Süßer die Glocken nie klingen"  
"Wir sagen euch an"  
"Es wird scho glei dumper"  
"Es hat sich heut' eröffnet"

## Occitan language Christmas songs

- La Cambo mi fa mau  
Guilhaume, Tòni, Pèire (William, Tony, Peter), tune attributed to Nicolas Saboly.  
Frédéric Mistral composed the provençal anthem Coupo santo (The Holy Cup) according to this Christmas carol. Lyrics, Midi file and music sheet.  
Nouvé dòu pastre (Christmas carol for the shepherd). Lyrics, Midi file and music sheet.  
L'Ouferta de Calèna (The Christmas' offering). Lyrics, Midi file and music sheet.  
Pastre dei mountagno (Shepherd from the mountains).

## Swedish language Christmas songs

December is the darkest month of the year in Sweden, so candles are often the theme in Swedish Christmas songs. *Ljus* is the Swedish word for candle.

- "Nu tändas tusen juleljus"  
"När ljusen tändas därhemma"  
"Ser du stjärnan i det blå"

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## Christmas carol

A **Christmas carol** (also called a **noël**) is a carol (song or hymn) whose lyrics are on the theme of [Christmas](#), or the winter season in general. They are traditionally sung in the period before and during [Christmas](#). The tradition of Christmas carols hails back as far as the thirteenth century, although carols were originally communal songs sung during celebrations like harvest tide as well as Christmas. It was only later that carols began to be sung in church, and to be specifically associated with Christmas. It is also a book which Charles Dickens wrote in 1843.

A popular urban legend was that they were named after a little girl named Carol Poles who disappeared in 1888 in the Whitechapel district of London. According to the legend, the little girl was reported missing around Christmas and many people went searching for her at night. Due to fears concerning Jack the Ripper, the group would sing Christmas carols upon knocking in order to declare their good intentions.

Traditional carols have a strong tune and consist of a verse and/or chorus for group singing. They are often based on medieval chord patterns, and it is this that gives them their uniquely characteristic musical sound. Some carols like '*Personent hodie*' and '*Angels from the Realms of Glory*' can be traced directly back to the Middle Ages, and are amongst the oldest musical compositions still regularly sung. Carols suffered a decline in popularity after the Reformation in the countries where Reformation settled, but survived in their rural communities until the revival of interest in Carols in the 19th century. Composers like Arthur Sullivan helped to repopularise the carol, and it is this period that gave rise to such favorites as "Good King Wenceslas" and "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear."

Today carols are regularly sung at religious services. Some compositions have words which are clearly not of a religious theme, but are often still referred to as carols.

Secular songs such as "White Christmas" and "Blue Christmas" are not true Christmas carols, though they are also popular in the period before Christmas, and should therefore be considered to be [Christmas songs](#).

Carols can be sung by individual singers, but are also often sung by larger groups, including professionally trained choirs. Most churches have special services at which carols are sung, generally combined with readings from scripture about the birth of Christ, often this is based on the famous Festival of [Nine Lessons and Carols](#) at King's College, Cambridge. Some of these services also include other music written for Christmas, such as Benjamin Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" (for choir and harp), or excerpts from Handel's "Messiah."

There is also a tradition of performances of serious music relating to Christmas in the period around Christmas, including Handel's "Messiah," the "Christmas Oratorio" by J. S. Bach, "Messe de Minuit pour Noël" by Charpentier, and "L'Enfance du Christ" by Berlioz.

In England, and some other countries (i.e. Poland (koldowanie) and Bulgaria (koledari)), there is a tradition of Christmas carolling (earlier known as wassailing), in which groups of singers travel from house to house, singing carols, for which they are often rewarded with

money, mince pies, or a glass of an appropriate drink. Money collected in this way is normally given to charity.

In Australia, where it is the middle of summer at Christmas, there is a tradition of [Carols by Candlelight](#) concerts which are held outdoors at night in cities and towns during the weeks leading up to Christmas. In Melbourne, "*Carols by Candlelight*" is held each Christmas Eve. Performers at the concerts including opera singers and musical theatre performers and popular music singers. People in the audience hold lit candles and join in singing some of the carols in accompaniment with the celebrities.

Christmas carols can also be played on musical instruments, and another tradition is for brass bands, such as the Salvation Army brass bands, to play carols before Christmas.

## Media

- Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring
  - Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben, BWV 147, by J. S. Bach
- Deck the Halls
- Oh Holy Night
- Jingle Bells
- Oh Christmas Tree
- It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
- Angels We Have Heard On High

## See also

- [List of Christmas carols](#)

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# List of Christmas carols

A [Christmas carol](#) is a carol whose lyrics center on the theme of [Christmas](#) or that has become associated with the Christmas season even though its lyrics may not specifically refer to Christmas. Both types of Christmas carols are included in this list.

Traditional carols mainly focus on the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Other carols focus on more secular [Christmas](#) themes, such as winter scenes, family gatherings, and [Santa Claus](#).

## Well known carols

- "Adeste Fideles" ("O Come All Ye Faithful")  
attributed to John Francis Wade around 1743  
"All Hail to Thee"  
"Angels From the Realms of Glory"  
"Angels We Have Heard On High"

based on traditional carol "Les Anges dans nos Campagnes"  
music is traditional hymn "Gloria"  
English translation by James Chadwick in 1862  
reworded, retitled, and sung by Michael W. Smith as "Gloria"  
"As Lately We Watched"  
"As With Gladness Men of Old"  
"Away in a Manger"  
first published in 1885  
first two stanzas attributed to unknown author  
third stanza written by Dr. John McFarland in 1904  
"Boar's Head Carol"  
"Break Forth, O Beauteous, Heav'nly Light"  
"Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella"  
"Carol of the Bells"  
music and Ukrainian lyrics written by Mykola Leontovych in 1916 (originally titled "Shchedryk")  
English lyrics written by Peter Wilhousky in 1936  
"Burgundian Carol"  
"Caroling Caroling"  
music written by Alfred Burt in 1954  
lyrics written by Wihla Hutson in 1954  
"The Cherry-Tree Carol"  
traditional  
"Children, Go Where I Send Thee"  
"Christ Is Born In Bethlehem"  
"Christians, Awake, Salute the Happy Morn"  
"Christmas Auld Lang Syne"  
"Christmas is Coming"  
"Come Buy My Nice Fresh Ivy"  
music written by Turlough O'Carolan (originally titled "O'Carolan's Lament")  
lyrics written by John Keegan in 1849  
"Coventry Carol"  
"Deck the Halls"  
"Ding Dong Merrily on High"  
music written by Jehan Tabourot  
words written by George Ratcliffe Woodward  
"Do You Hear What I Hear?"  
written by Noel Regney and Gloria Shayne in 1962  
first recorded by The Harry Simeone Chorale in 1962  
"The First Noël"  
traditional  
"The Friendly Beasts"  
"Gabriel's Message"  
"Gaudete"  
"Gesù Bambino"

"Gloucester Wassail"  
"Go Tell it on The Mountain"  
"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"  
"Good King Wenceslas"  
"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"  
music written by Felix Mendelssohn originally as part of Festgesang  
words written by Charles Wesley  
"Here We Come a-Wassailing"  
"Hey, Ho, Nobody Home"  
"The Holly and the Ivy"  
"Huron Carol" ("Twas in the Moon of Wintertime")  
"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"  
lyrics by Longfellow  
"In The Bleak Midwinter"  
"I Saw Three Ships"  
"I Wonder As I Wander"  
"In Dulci Jubilo" ("Good Christian Men, Rejoice" or "Good Christian Friends,  
Rejoice")  
"In the Bleak Midwinter"  
"It Came Upon A Midnight Clear"  
"Joy to the World"  
"Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mild"  
"The Little Drummer Boy"  
written by Katherine Davis, Henry Onorah and Harry Simeone  
first recorded by The Harry Simeone Chorale in 1958  
also recorded by Bob Seger, Percy Faith, Mercy Me, Jars of Clay  
"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"  
"Love Came Down at Christmas"  
"March of the Kings"  
"Mary's Little Boy Child"  
"Masters in This Hall"  
"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" ("Veni, Veni, Emmanuel"; actually an Advent  
hymn)  
"O Come, Little Children"  
"O Holy Night"  
"O Little Town of Bethlehem"  
retitled and sung by Amy Grant as "Little Town"  
"O Tannenbaum"  
"Of the Father's Love Begotten"  
"Once In Royal David's City"  
"O Sanctissima"  
"On Christmas Night all Christians Sing"  
"Out of the East"  
"Pat-A-Pan"  
"The Peace Carol"

"Personent Hodie"  
"Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"  
"Rocking"  
"Sans Day Carol"  
"Saw Ye Never, in the Twilight"  
"Silent Night"  
written by Franz Xaver Gruber  
"Silver and Gold"  
"Sing We Now of Christmas"  
"The Snow Lay on the Ground"  
"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"  
"Still, Still, Still"  
"The Sussex Carol"  
"Sweet Little Jesus Boy"  
"There's a Song in the Air"  
"Torches"  
composed by John Joubert in 1951  
"The Twelve Days of Christmas"  
traditional  
"Unto Us a Boy is Born"  
"The Wassail Song"  
"Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"  
"The Virgin's Slumber Song"  
"We Wish You A Merry Christmas"  
traditional  
"We Three Kings Of Orient Are" (actually an Epiphany carol)  
written by Reverend John Henry Hopkins in 1863  
"Wexford Carol"  
"What Child Is This?"  
music is traditional song "Greensleeves"  
words written by William Chatterton Dix  
"While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night"

### **Popular Christmas songs that are not considered carols**

- "A Holly Jolly Christmas"  
written by Johnny Marks  
first recorded by Burl Ives in 1964  
also recorded by Alan Jackson  
"A Marshmellow World"  
words by Carl Sigman  
music by Peter De Rose  
recorded by Bing Crosby  
"All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth"  
written by Donald Yetter Gardner

first recorded by Spike Jones in 1948  
"All I Want for Christmas Is You"  
written by Walter Afanasieff and Mariah Carey  
first recorded by Mariah Carey in 1994  
"Babes in Toyland"  
written by Victor Herbert and Glen MacDonough  
"Blue Christmas"  
written by Bill Hayes and Jay Johnson  
first recorded by Doye O'Dell in 1948  
also recorded by Elvis Presley  
"Buon Natale"  
words and Music by Bob Saffer and Frank Linale  
recorded by Nat King Cole  
"C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S"  
words by Jenny Lou Carson  
music by Eddy Arnold  
"The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late)"  
written by Ross Bagdasarian  
first recorded by The Chipmunks in 1958  
"Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)"  
written by Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich and Phil Spector  
first recorded by Darlene Love in 1963  
also recorded by Mariah Carey, Rosie O'Donnell featuring Cher  
"Christmas All Over Again"  
written by Tom Petty  
first recorded by Tom Petty in 1992  
"Christmas Day"  
music by Burt Bacharach, lyrics by Hal David  
from the Broadway musical Promises, Promises (1968)  
"Christmas for Cowboys"  
words and music by Steve Weisburg  
"Christmas in Killarney"  
words and music by John Redmond, James Cavanaugh, and Frank Weldon  
"Christmas is"  
words by Spence Maxwell  
music by Percy Faith  
"Christmas Island"  
words and music by Lyle Moraine  
"Christmas Shoes"  
written by Leonard Ahlstrom and Eddie Carswell  
first recorded by NewSong in 2000  
"The Christmas Song (Merry Christmas to You)"  
written by Mel Tormé and Robert Wells  
first recorded by The Nat King Cole Trio in 1946  
also recorded by The Carpenters, Celine Dion, Al Jarreau, Luther Vandross, Toni

Braxton

"Christmas Time: Don't Let The Bells End"

first recorded by The Darkness

"Christmas Time Is Here"

written by Vince Guaraldi and Lee Mendelson

first recorded by Vince Guaraldi in 1965

also recorded by Chicago, Mercy Me, Diana Krall, Toni Braxton

"Christmas Time Is Here Again"

written by George Harrison, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr

first recorded by The Beatles

"Christmas Vacation"

written by Cynthia Weil and Barry Mann

"The Christmas Waltz"

music by Jules Styne, lyrics by Sammy Cahn, c.'Bold text'1954

recorded by Frank Sinatra, Nancy Wilson, Nat King Cole, Peggy Lee, Harry Connick Jr., The Carpenters, and many others

"Do They Know It's Christmas?"

written by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure

first recorded by Band Aid

"Feliz Navidad"

written by José Feliciano

first recorded by José Feliciano in 1970

also recorded by Celine Dion

"Frosty the Snowman"

written by Steve Edward Nelson and Jack Rollins

first recorded by Gene Autry in 1950

also recorded by the Jackson 5, Willie Nelson

"Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer"

written by Randy Brooks

first recorded by Elmo & Patsy in 1983

"Hanover Winter Song"

words and music by Richard Hovey and Frierick Field Bullard

"Happy Birthday Jesus"

words by Estelle Levitt

music by Lee Pockriss

"Happy Xmas (War Is Over)"

written by John Lennon and Yoko Ono

first recorded by John & Yoko The Plastic Ono Band with the Harlem Community Choir

also recorded by Celine Dion

"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"

written by Ralph Blane and Hugh Martin

first recorded by Judy Garland for the film "Meet Me in St. Louis" in 1944

also recorded by Frank Sinatra, The Carpenters, James Taylor, The Pretenders, Amy Grant, Chicago, Kenny Loggins, Toni Braxton



"Here Comes Santa Claus (Right Down Santa Claus Lane)"

written by Gene Autry and Oakley Haldeman

first recorded by Gene Autry in 1947

also recorded by Elvis Presley

"I Believe In Father Christmas"

written by Greg Lake and Peter Sinfield

first recorded by Greg Lake of Emerson Lake and Palmer in 1977

"I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus"

written by Thomas Connor

first recorded by Jimmy Boyd in 1952

"I'll Be Home for Christmas"

written by Kim Gannon, Walter Kent and Buck Ram

first recorded by Bing Crosby in 1943

also recorded by Frank Sinatra, Amy Grant, The Carpenters

"It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas"

written by Robert Meredith Willson

first recorded by Perry Como on September 18, 1951

also recorded by Bing Crosby, Johnny Mathis

"It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year"

written by Edward Pola and George Wyle

first recorded by Andy Williams in 1963

also recorded by Amy Grant, Johnny Mathis, Toni Braxton

"Jing-A-Ling, Jing-A-Ling"

words by Don Ray

music by Paul J. Smith

In the film Beaver Valley

"Jingle Bell Rock"

written by Joe Beale and Jim Boothe

first recorded by Bobby Helms in 1957

also recorded by Hall & Oates

"Jingle Bells"

written by James Pierpont

"Jolly Old St. Nicholas"

traditional

"Last Christmas"

written by George Michael

first recorded by Wham!

also recorded by Hilary Duff, Jimmy Eat World, Darren Hayes of Savage Garden, Billie Piper

"Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!"

written by Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne

first recorded by Vaughn Monroe on October 31, 1945

also recorded by Andy Williams, Chicago, Gloria Estefan, Dean Martin, Johnny Mathis

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

## NICOLAE SFETCU: ABOUT CHRISTMAS

written by Jill Jackson and Seymour Miller  
"The Little Boy That Santa Claus Forgot"  
words and music by Tommie Connor, Jimmy Leach, and Michael Carr  
"Little Saint Nick"  
written by Brian Wilson  
first recorded by The Beach Boys in 1964  
"Mele Kalikimaka (the Hawaiian Christmas Song)"  
words and music by R. Alex Anderson  
Recorded by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters  
"Merry Christmas, Baby"  
"The Merry Christmas Polka"  
words by Paul Francis Webster  
music by Sonny Burke  
written by Lou Baxter and Johnny Moore  
"Merry Xmas Everybody"  
written by Noddy Holder and Jim Lea  
first recorded by Slade  
"Nuttin' for Christmas"  
words and music by Sid Pepper and Roy C. Bennett  
first performed by Barry Gordon on The Milton Berle Show  
also recorded by Stan Freburg, Eartha Kitt, and Homer and Jethro among others  
"Please Come Home for Christmas"  
written by Charles Brown|Charles Mose Brown and Gene C. Redd  
first recorded by Charles Brown in 1960  
also recorded by The Eagles, Aaron Neville  
"Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree"  
written by Johnny Marks  
first recorded by Brenda Lee in 1958  
"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"  
written by Johnny Marks  
first recorded by Gene Autry in 1949  
also recorded by Harry Connick, Jr., Burl Ives, Ray Conniff, Dean Martin  
"Run Rudolph Run"  
written by Marvin Brodie and Johnny Marks  
first recorded by Chuck Berry in 1958  
"Santa Baby"  
written by Joan Javits, Philip Springer and Tony Springer  
first recorded by Eartha Kitt in 1953  
"Santa Claus Is Back in Town"  
written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller  
first recorded by Elvis Presley in 1957  
"Santa Claus Is Coming To Town"  
written by J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie  
recorded by Mariah Carey, Bruce Springsteen, Chicago

NICOLAE SFETCU: ABOUT CHRISTMAS

"Santa Claus, Indiana, U.S.A

words and Music by Abe Olman and Al Jacobs

"Silver Bells"

written by Ray Evans and Jay Livingston

first recorded by Bing Crosby in 1951

"Sleep Well, Little Children (A Christmas Lullaby)"

words by Alan Burgman

Music by Leon Latzkin

Recorded by The Carpenters

"Sleigh Ride"

music written by Leroy Anderson in 1948

lyrics written by Mitchell Parish in 1950

instrumental version first recorded by Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops Orchestra in 1949

vocal version first recorded by Merv Griffin with Freddy Martin and his Orchestra in 1951

also recorded by Deborah Gibson, Amy Grant, Leroy Anderson, The Carpenters, Air Supply, Johnny Mathis

"Suzy Snowflake"

words and music by Sid Topper and Roy C. Bennett

"Take Me Back To Toyland"

words by Kal Mann

Music by Bernie Lowe

"That's What I Want for Christmas"

words by Irving Caesar

music by Gerald Marks

"(There's No Place Like) Home for the Holidays"

written by Robert Allen and Al Stillman

first recorded by Perry Como on November 16, 1954

also recorded by The Carpenters

"Toyland"

words by Glen MacDonough

music by Victor Herbert

part of the oppetetta Babes in Toyland

"Up on the Housetop"

traditional

"We Need a Little Christmas"

written by Jerry Herman

first recorded by The Original Broadway Cast of Mame 1966

also recorded by Percy Faith, Johnny Mathis, Andy Williams

"When Santa Claus Gets your Letter"

words and Music by Johnny Marks

"White Christmas"

written by Irving Berlin

first recorded by Bing Crosby for the film "Holiday Inn" in 1942

also recorded by Chicago  
"Whispering Hope"  
written by Alice Hawthorne  
"Will Santy Come to Shanty Town?"  
words and music by Eddy Arnold, Steve Nelson, and Ed Nelson, Jr.  
"Winter"  
words by Alfred Bryan  
music by Albert Gumble  
"Winter Wonderland"  
written by Felix Bernard and Dick Smith  
first recorded by Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians in 1934  
also recorded by Amy Grant, Eurythmics, Johnny Mathis  
"Wonderful Christmas Time"  
written by Paul McCartney  
first recorded by Paul McCartney

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## Charity record

A **charity record** (also known as a **charity single**) is a release of a song for a specific charitable cause. Some of the earliest charity records came from the Music for UNICEF Concert, with ABBA's *Chiquitita*, The Bee Gees' *Too Much Heaven* among them released as singles, with all the royalties going to UNICEF. Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas?* began the revolution of the charity record, which would be popularised throughout the 1980s. In the United States, charity records reached their peak with *We are the World* in 1985, but then essentially died out afterwards. In the United Kingdom, however, charity singles (especially Comic Relief), have become yearly #1 hits.

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## Christmas traditions

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# Advent calendar

An **Advent calendar** is a symbol of the holy season of Advent, celebrated in December near [Christmas](#), another holiday season.

The traditional calendar consists of two pieces of cardboard on top of each other. Twenty four doors are cut out in the top layer, with one door being opened every day, from December 1 to December 24 ([Christmas Eve](#)). Each compartment can either show a part of the Nativity story and the birth of Jesus, or can simply display a piece of paraphernalia to do with Christmas (e.g. Bells, holly). Advent Calendars can also consist of cloth sheets with small pockets to be filled with candy or other small items. Many calendars have been adapted by merchandisers and manufacturers to include a piece of chocolate or a sweet behind each compartment, aimed at children. These have often been criticised for not relating to the Nativity and simply cashing in on Christmas sales. These are aimed at small children who are counting down to Christmas, because that is when [Santa Claus](#) comes.

The number of doors can also increase to twenty five or twenty six to cover Christmas Day, Hanukkah and Boxing Day, and further to thirty one or thirty two to include New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. This latter act was particularly evident over December 1999, counting down to January 1, 2000 and what was largely perceived as the start of the third millennium (although the same thing did not happen a year later in the lead up to what was technically the real third millennium on January 1, 2001).

The Advent calendar is normally of standard dimensions, but can be found in other shapes, such as a model of a house. There are alternative forms of Advent calendar, such as those made from felt or other material, or a chain of candles that can be lit day by day. The German city of Dresden has a giant calendar built into a fairytale castle on its Christmas market, the Striezelmarkt. The world's biggest Advent Calendar is in Gengenbach (Germany) at the front of the city hall. Nowadays there are also digital Advent calendars.

In Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland there is also a tradition of having a so-called 'Julekalender' in the form of a television show starting on the first of December, and ending on the 24th - Christmas Eve. Over the years, there have been several different kinds of 'Julekalender'; some directed at children, some at both children and adults, and even some directed at adults alone. A classic example of a 'Julekalender' enjoyed by children (as well as adults, if purely for nostalgic reasons) is the show 'Jul i Skomakergata'. A more modern version of the 'Julekalender' is the show 'The 24th', which is obviously something of a parody on the popular series '24' starring Kiefer Sutherland. The julekalender often leads to controversy, there always being someone regarding it as too dirty, too boring for older children, too little connection with Christmas, etc. The only stories which don't get these complaints are adventure stories that are not *too* exciting and who regularly mention Christmas, like Mysteriet på Greveholm.

## See also

- [Christmas](#)

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## Advent wreath

An **advent wreath** is a ring or set of four candles, usually made with evergreen cuttings and used for household devotion by some Christians during the season of Advent. Many churches illuminate these candles in succession through the four weeks leading up to Christmas as part of their Sunday services for Advent.

Typically, three of the candles are violet-coloured, and one is rose-coloured. Increasingly, due to changes in the Church's lectionary in the United States, all four candles may be violet. When used in household devotion, one violet candle is lit on the first evening of Advent (a Saturday). On successive Saturdays, the second violet candle is added, then the rose candle, and finally, the third violet candle. Some Anglicans and Lutherans use blue candles rather than violet. Some wreaths have a larger, central fifth candle (generally white), which is lit on [Christmas](#) Day to signify Christ's birth.

The wreath is meant to represent God's eternity. The violet candles symbolize faithful expectation, and the rose candle joy and hope. In earlier times the season of Advent had stronger penitential and ascetic aspects, and a relaxation of disciplines was offered on the third Sunday of Advent, also called Gaudete Sunday, from the Latin for "rejoice." This turn is reflected in the theme of rejoicing and the shift from violet to rose.

The first candle is often called the **prophet's candle**, and is meant to signify the hope of Jesus' arrival. The second is generally called the **Bethlehem candle**, reminding Christians that God appeared to them in a humble manner; Bethlehem was located in the territory of one of the least powerful tribes of Israel. The third candle is the **shepherds' candle**, representing the joy that more than half of Advent is over. The final candle is the angels' candle, symbolising their peace and the message of good news that they offer.

The first Advent wreath was invented by Johann Hinrich Wichern, a Protestant parson in Hamburg, Germany (sources differ about the year: 1839 or 1848.) He was leading an orphanage. The children first made a wooden ring (another source says it was a chandelier) of 2m in diameter with 28 candles affixed on one side: Four white ones, which were bigger to indicate the advent sundays, and 24 smaller red-coloured candles. During each service of daily prayer a child would light one candle, until on [Christmas Eve](#) all of them would be illuminated. It is thought that children liked this ring so much that they decorated it with evergreen twigs, mainly from fir trees. Later the number of candles was reduced to the four main ones.

It took about 100 years until home decoration with advent wreaths became a custom in Germany. It has now spread to other countries as well.

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# American Christmas traditions



American Christmas tree

**American Christmas traditions** range from religious symbols to the mythos of [Santa Claus](#). Their origins are both Christian and pagan.

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## Introduction

[Christmas](#) traditions in the United States encompass the customs, history, folklore, family practices, interior and exterior decorations, religious and secular symbols, and perennial television shows and movies connected with this holiday. Many American Christmas traditions originated as Germanic Christmas traditions.

## Traditions

### Christmas tree

The [Christmas tree](#), or Tannenbaum, has its roots in pre-Christian Germany. Religious rites were held in the forests and trees were decorated with candles. Like the Druids, the oak was sacred to the ancient Germans, in particular to the god Odin, so it was often the oaks that were lit and not the pines. The use of evergreens can be traced back to the 8th century, which is when St. Boniface engaged in the common practice of adopting local pagan customs to help Christianize the indigenous peoples. He substituted the fir tree (Tannenbaum) for the oak of Odin and then he dedicated it to Christ, making it the Christbaum. The creation of the modern Christmas tree is often attributed to the founder of the Lutheran movement, Martin Luther (1483-1546). This is questionable but there are "Tannenbaum" songs that date back to the middle of the 16th century. By the 19th century the Christmas tree had become popular in Europe and America, having been introduced by German immigrants.

### Santa Claus

Traditional American Santa Claus

Santa Claus also has his origins in Germany. When Germany was being Christianized in the early Middle Ages, St. Nicholas, a 4th century bishop of Asia Minor, became popular there. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of children and his feast day is December 6th. Gradually a custom grew up where on the eve of St. Nicholas' feast day children would place their shoes or boots out for St. Nicholas to fill with candy and fruit, with the bad children getting twigs. St. Nicholas carried with him a book of sins with which he determined whether the child warranted the goodies or the twigs. Historically, St. Nicholas rode a white horse and he traveled with a dark-faced companion. The most common one was called Knecht Ruprecht. After the Protestant Reformation in Germany, German authorities wanted to do away with the image of a Catholic saint distributing gifts, so the idea of Santa Claus, a jovial grandfather-type figure in dark green robes with a white beard was born. St. Nicholas is known by several names in different parts of Germany. These include Klaasbuur, Rauklas, Bullerklaas, and Sunnercla. In the eastern part of Germany, he is Ash Man, Shaggy Goat, or Rider. The American "Kris Kringle" is a corruption of the German term Christkindl ("Christ Child"). America altered the



image of Santa Claus further when the advertising department of The Coca-Cola Company decided to produce ads depicting him in the soft drink's iconic red-and-white color scheme, cementing the image of Santa that persists today.

## **Nativity scene**

A [nativity scene](#), also called a crèche (meaning crib in French), refers to a depiction of the birthplace of Jesus. These are generally either life-size or near life-size outdoor displays situated in yards or public squares, or small miniature scenes placed in homes. At the very least it includes the figures of Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus situated in the manger. They are sometimes supplemented by the Three Wise Men, the stable boy, the innkeeper, and other characters involved in the story of Christ's birth.

## **Christmas card**

A [Christmas card](#) is a greeting card that is decorated in a manner that celebrates Christmas. Typical content ranges from purely Christian symbols such as nativity scenes and the Star of Bethlehem to more general Christmas images such as Santa Claus, Christmas trees, snowmen, and similar themes.

## **Christmas carol**

A [Christmas carol](#) is a song whose lyrics are on the theme of Christmas. A Christmas song is often only considered a carol after it has been in existence for many years. The tradition of Christmas carols dates back to the 13th century A.D.

## **Christmas gift**

In the United States, children receive their gifts from 'Santa Claus.' Christmas presents are usually opened on Christmas Day but some people open their gifts on Christmas Eve.

## **Christmas lights**

[Christmas lights](#) are strands of electric lights used to decorate Christmas trees, homes, and other buildings during the [Christmas season](#).

## **Television and movies**

A popular tradition of the entertainment establishment in the United States is to produce films, television specials and episodes of established television series generally set during the Christmas season. Some of the most notable of these include:

- A Charlie Brown Christmas  
A Christmas Carol (1951 film)  
A Christmas Story  
Frosty the Snowman

How the Grinch Stole Christmas!  
It's a Wonderful Life  
Miracle on 34th Street  
National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation  
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (TV special)

### See also

- [Christmas worldwide](#)
- [German Christmas traditions](#)
- [Yule log](#)

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## Ashen faggot

The **ashen faggot** (sometimes called ashton fagot) is an old English Christmas tradition found in Devonshire and Somersetshire, similar to that of the [Yule log](#) and related to the [wassail](#) tradition. The wassail party passes around a bundle of ash sticks, twigs or branches -- the ashen faggot -- bound with green ash withies, which is then placed onto the fire. As each binding bursts, the watchers toast it with a drink. Some traditions had the unmarried women each choosing a withy, and the first one whose tie snapped would be married the next year.

When the bindings have all burst and the bundle has fallen loose, each person who plans to host the festivities next year takes one of the half-burned ash sticks and saves it until the following Christmas, when it will go in the center of their own ashen faggot. The tradition endures (or has been resurrected) in many places; according to an article in the Winter 2005 issue of *Devon Talk*, the Harbour Inn in Axmouth annually builds an ashen faggot six feet high and three feet wide for their huge pub fireplace.

Some traditions held that not burning the ashen faggot in your house brought bad luck, or that having an ashen faggot in the house kept the Devil away. Ash was likely chosen because the ash tree has a long pedigree of magical associations: perhaps the most important is the Yggdrasil of Norse mythology, also known as the World Ash Tree.

### See also

- [wassail](#)

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# Christmas Bird Count

The **Christmas Bird Count** (CBC) is a census of birds in the Western Hemisphere, performed annually in the early Northern-hemisphere winter by volunteer birders. The purpose is to provide population data for use in science, especially conservation biology, though many people participate for recreation.

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## History

Up through the 19th century, many North Americans participated in the tradition of [Christmas](#) "side hunts", in which they competed at how many birds they could kill, regardless of whether they had any use for the carcasses and of whether the birds were beneficial, beautiful, or rare. At the end of that century the U.S. ornithologist Frank Chapman, an officer in the recently formed National Audubon Society, proposed counting birds on Christmas instead of killing them.

In 1900, 27 observers took part in the first count in 25 places in the United States and Canada, 15 of them in the northeastern U.S. from Massachusetts to Philadelphia. Since then the counts have been held every winter, usually with increasing numbers of observers. For instance, the 101st count, in the winter of 2000-2001, involved 52,471 people in 1,823 places in 17 countries (but mostly in the U.S. and Canada). The Audubon Society now partners with Bird Studies Canada, the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory of Texas (responsible for CBCs in Mexico), and the Red Nacional de Observadores de Aves (RNOA, National Network of Bird Observers) and the Instituto Alexander von Humboldt of Colombia.

## Methods

Each individual count is performed in a "count circle" with a diameter of 15 miles or 24 kilometres. At least ten volunteers, including a compiler to manage things, count in each circle. They break up into small parties and follow assigned routes, which change little from year to year, counting every bird they see. In most count circles, some people also watch feeders instead of following routes.

Counts can be held on any day from December 14 to January 5 inclusive.

The results are by no means as accurate as a human census. Not all the area even in the count circles is covered, and not every bird along the routes is seen or identified. Big flocks can't be counted precisely. Also, telling whether a bird has been counted twice can be difficult. The rules address this problem by prohibiting counting birds when retracing one's route, except for species that the party hasn't seen before. Also, when a large roost of some species occurs in a count circle, an expert estimates the number for that species during the

morning or evening and usually no individuals are counted at other times. Observers can attempt to keep track of flocks of mobile birds such as crows, and can use their judgement, even sometimes recognizing an individual bird or at least recognizing that two birds of the same species are different individuals.

The results, providing data on winter ranges of birds, are complementary to those of the Breeding Bird Surveys.

## Participation

Participation is open to all. Observers pay a \$5 fee (except feeder watchers, U.S. participants under 19 years old, and Latin Americans in their home countries). The fee supports compilation and publication of the data. U.S. participants who pay or who are 18 or under receive a copy of the issue of *American Birds* that summarizes the results and includes articles on trends and regions.

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## Bracebridge dinner

**Bracebridge dinner** is an annual [Christmas](#) event held at Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel. Started in 1927, the first year of operation for the Ahwahnee, the dinner is inspired by Squire Bracebridge's Yule celebration in a story from *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* by Washington Irving. The event is a six course formal dinner presented as a feast held by a Victorian era lord. Music and acting are involved in the introduction of each course.



A curtain showing the Lady and Squire

Dr. Donald Tresidder, then president of Yosemite Park & Curry Co., had hired Garnet Holme to create the event for the grand dining room at the new hotel. Holme and his wife played the Squire and his lady for the first two years, until Holme's death in 1929. Tresidder then asked Ansel Adams, who had played a supporting role previously, to take on the direction of the show. Adams reworked the script considerably, taking the role of Squire, while his wife played the Housekeeper, a much more significant role than Lady Bracebridge.

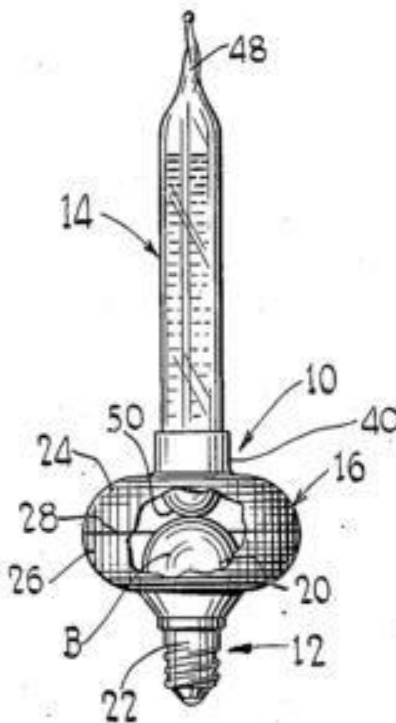
The dinner was not held during World War II, as the Ahwahnee was functioning as a military hospital. The 1945 dinner introduced a chorus and a more significant musical aspect. Ansel Adams retired from the event in 1973, passing it on to Eugene Fulton. Much of the cast returns year after year, ensuring a continuity of traditions. As of 2004, the longest running member of the cast is Andrea Fulton, daughter of Eugene. Andrea began performing in 1950 at the age of five, and now has the role of Housekeeper.

For much of its history tickets to the show were difficult to obtain. Prior to 1956 it was a single show, but the number of performances has gradually increased to a total of eight in 2002 (and currently) so that it no longer sells out in a single day or week.

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## Bubble light



A Christmas bubble light, as depicted in a patent illustration.

A **bubble light** is a decorative device consisting of a liquid-filled vial that is heated and lighted by an incandescent light bulb. Because of the liquid's low boiling point, the modest

heat generated by the lamp causes the liquid to boil and bubble up from the vial's base. The liquid is almost always methylene chloride, but some early bubble lights used a lightweight oil. The light from the lamp illuminates the bubbles from underneath, causing them to shine.

Bubble lights for [Christmas](#) decoration were introduced in 1946 by NOMA, one of the largest American manufacturers of [Christmas lights](#). Bubble lights were also used in operating accessories for Lionel and American Flyer model trains (in the case of American Flyer as bubbling oil wells), and they were also used in a larger form as decoration for Wurlitzer jukeboxes.

As Christmas lights, bubble lights were very popular during the 1950s and 1960s, and into the 1970s, before miniature "fairy" lights became popular. The original design used a miniature screw base (E-10), such as those used on C-6 cone Christmas lamps. These early designs were nominally designed to operate with 8 on one string, in series, at 15 volts each. However, they were often packaged with a nine-socket string to extend the life of the bulbs. Bubble lights could also be purchased individually for use in an already-owned light string. Modern incarnations use candelabra base (E-11), 120-volt bulbs.

The clear light bulb is enclosed in a plastic base made up of a "bowl" and a "cap," usually of different colors. Bubble lights are manufactured in just about any color, including the liquid in the tube. The plastics used are most commonly semi-opaque red, yellow, blue, and green. Liquids are generally amber, red, blue and green. Uncolored liquid is also available, being lit with colored bulbs instead.

In recent years bubble lights have gotten fancier. Glitter is sometimes added to tubes for extra sparkle. This is most common on specialty types such as those used in decorative nightlights. The bases are now often made to look like objects such as [Santas](#) or snowmen, rather than the plain ribbed plastic. Like many other [Christmas decorations](#), they have been converted for Halloween use, usually with orange liquid and a base that looks like a jack-o-lantern, or the head of a black cat or witch, among other Halloween symbols.

Bubble lights of all kinds operate best when the top of the tube is significantly cooler than the bottom, thus increasing the pressure gradient. The tubes must be kept upright, and occasionally need to be tapped or even shaken to begin bubbling after warming up. Bulbs should not be stored in a hot (or very cold) attic, as this will cause them to not bubble as well later on.

Modern imitations of bubble lights are made from acrylic or other clear plastic rods, with permanent bubbles deliberately manufactured into them, and lit with fixed-color or color-changing LEDs. Other bubbling lights are much larger and sit on a table or floor, occasionally with fake fish which "swim" up and down in the changing buoyancy. These tubes are filled with distilled water and have one or more airstones at the bottom, and normally a light, along with the air pump.

## Patents

- [US #2,031,409: February 18, 1936](#)
- [US #2,031,416: February 18, 1936](#)
- [US #2,162,897: June 20, 1939](#)
- [US #2,174,446: September 26, 1939](#)

- [US #2,353,063: July 4, 1944](#)

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## Christmas card

A **Christmas card** is a greeting card that is decorated in a manner that celebrates [Christmas](#). Typical content ranges from truly Christian symbols such as [Nativity scenes](#) and the Star of Bethlehem to purely secular references, sometimes humorous, to seasonal weather or common Christmastime activities like shopping and partying. Christmas cards are exchanged during the Christmas season (around December 25) by many people (including non-Christians) in Western culture and in Japan.

Some Christian groups (such as Jehovah's Witnesses), however, disdain the celebration of holidays without explicit [Biblical](#) authorization, and so neither celebrate Christmas nor exchange Christmas cards.

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### History



The world's first Christmas card, made by John Callcott Horsley

The first commercial Christmas cards were commissioned by Sir Henry Cole in London, 1843, and featured an illustration by John Callcott Horsley. The picture, of a family with a small child drinking wine together, proved controversial, but the idea was shrewd: Cole had helped introduce the Penny Post three years earlier. A batch of 1000 cards was printed and



they sold for a shilling each; in December 2005, one of these cards was auctioned for nearly £9000.

Early English cards rarely showed winter or religious themes, instead favoring flowers, fairies and other fanciful designs that reminded the recipient of the approach of spring. Humorous and sentimental images of children and animals were popular, as were increasingly elaborate shapes, decorations and materials. In 1875 Louis Prang became the first printer to offer cards in America, though the popularity of his cards led to cheap imitations that eventually drove him from the market. The advent of the postcard spelled the end for elaborate Victorian-style cards, but by the 1920s, cards with envelopes had returned.

Cards continued to evolve throughout the 20th century with changing tastes and printing techniques. The World Wars brought cards with patriotic themes. Idiosyncratic "studio cards" with cartoon illustrations and sometimes risqué humor caught on in the 1950s. Nostalgic, sentimental, and religious images are once again popular, and reproductions of Victorian and Edwardian cards are easy to obtain.

"Official" Christmas cards began with Queen Victoria in the 1840s. The British royal family's cards are generally portraits reflecting significant personal events of the year. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued the first official White House card. The cards usually depict White House scenes as rendered by prominent American artists. The number of recipients has snowballed over the decades, from just 2000 in 1961 to 1.4 million in 2005.

Modern Christmas cards can be bought individually but are usually sold in packs of the same or varied designs. A revival of interest in paper crafts, particularly scrapbooking, has raised the status of the homemade card and made available an array of tools for stamping, punching and cutting. Advances in digital photography and printing have provided a more technological way to personalize cards with photos, messages, or clip art.

Technology may also be responsible for the decline of the Christmas card. The estimated number of cards received by American households dropped from 29 in 1987 to 20 in 2004. Email and telephones allow for more frequent contact and are easier for generations raised without handwritten letters. Nonetheless, with 1.9 billion cards sent in the U.S. in 2005 alone, they are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

From the beginning, Christmas cards have been avidly collected. Queen Mary amassed a large collection that is now housed in the British Museum. Specimens from the "golden age" of printing (1840s-1890s) are especially prized and bring in large sums at auctions. Collectors may focus on particular images like [Santa Claus](#), poets, or printing techniques.

## The Christmas card list

Many people send cards to both close friends and distant acquaintances, potentially making the sending of cards a multi-hour chore in addressing scores or even hundreds of envelopes. The greeting in the card can be personalized but brief, or may include a summary of the year's news. The extreme of this is the **Christmas letter** (below). Because cards are usually exchanged year after year, the phrase "to be off someone's Christmas card list" is used to indicate a falling out between friends or public figures.

Many businesses, particularly smaller local businesses, also send Christmas cards to the people on their customer lists, as a way to develop general goodwill, retain brand awareness and reinforce social networks. These cards are almost always tasteful, and do not attempt to

sell a product, limiting themselves to mentioning the name of the business. The practice harkens back to "trade cards" of the 18th century, an ancestor of the modern Christmas card.

## Christmas letters

Some people take the annual mass mailing of cards as an opportunity to update everybody with the year's events, and include the so-called "Christmas letter" reporting on the family's doings, sometimes running to multiple printed pages. While a practical notion, Christmas letters meet with a mixed reception; recipients may take it as boring minutiae, bragging, or a combination of the two. Since the letter will be received by both close and distant relatives, there is also the potential for the family members to object to how they are presented to others; an entire episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond* was built around conflict over the content of just such a letter.

## Variants on the concept

In 2004, the German post office gave away 20 million of free scented stickers, to make Christmas cards smell of a fir [Christmas tree](#), cinnamon, [gingerbread](#), a honey-wax candle, a baked apple and an orange.

## Charity

Many organizations produce special Christmas cards as a fundraising tool; the most famous of these enterprises is probably the UNICEF Christmas card program.

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# Carols by Candlelight

**Carols by Candlelight** is an Australian [Christmas](#) tradition that has spread around the world. It involves people gathering, usually outdoors in a park, to sing carols by candlelight, accompanied by a band.

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- [1 History](#)
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- 3 Broadcast

## History

**Carols by Candlelight** was begun in Melbourne in 1938 by Norman Banks, a radio announcer then with Melbourne radio station 3KZ. Whilst walking home from his night-time radio shift on Christmas Eve in 1937, he passed a window and saw inside an elderly woman

sitting up in bed, listening to Away in a Manger being played on the radio and singing along, with her face being lit by candlelight. Wondering how many others spent Christmas alone, he had the idea to gather a large group of people to all sing Christmas carols together by candlelight, and the first such event was held in the Alexandra Gardens the following Christmas. This first event had 10,000 people attend.

Following World War II, the Carols moved to the nearby Sidney Myer Music Bowl, where they are still held to this day. Funds raised from donations are given to Vision Australia (Previously the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind), who are still the beneficiaries.

## Events

Similar events are now held all over Australia, usually arranged by churches, municipal councils, or other community groups. They are normally held on Christmas Eve or the Sunday before Christmas. The major Australian events are the Melbourne Carols (which attracts about 30,000 people) held at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl on Christmas Eve and the Sydney Carols in The Domain (which attracts about 20,000) and borrows the shape of its stage from its big brother, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne. Both of these are televised nationally and the Melbourne Carols By Candlelight is televised also to eastern Asia, many Pacific Islands and New Zealand, live.

In Brisbane the Lord Mayor's Christmas Carols are held about a week before Christmas, at the Brisbane River Stage in the Brisbane City Botanic Gardens.

In Adelaide, Carols by Candlelight is held in the weeks before Christmas in Elder Park on the banks of the River Torrens.

## Broadcast

Since the 1980's, the event has been broadcast nationally on Channel 9 and simlecast on local radio. The program is hosted by journalist Ray Martin who invites viewvers to either cuddle up with their family, or join 9's family for the night.

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## Christmas cracker

**Christmas crackers**, known as **bon-bons** in Australia, are an integral part of British [Christmas](#) celebrations. It consists of a cardboard tube wrapped in a brightly decorated twist of paper, making it resemble an oversized sweet-wrapper. The cracker is pulled by two people, and, much in the manner of a wishbone, the cracker splits unevenly. The split is accompanied by a small bang produced by the effect of friction on a chemically impregnated card strip (similar to that used in a cap gun).

The person with the larger portion of cracker empties the contents from the tube and keeps them. Typically these contents are a coloured paper hat or crown; a small toy or other trinket; and a motto, a joke or piece of trivia on a scrap of paper. Crackers are often pulled after Christmas dinner or at parties.

Assembled crackers are typically sold in boxes of three to twelve. These typically have different designs usually with red, green and gold colours. Making crackers from scratch using the tubes from used toilet rolls and tissue paper is a common activity for children.

It is a running joke that all the jokes and mottos in crackers are unfunny and unmemorable. Similarly, in most standard commercial products, the "gift" is equally awful, although wealthier individuals—notably, the royal family—may use custom crackers with more expensive rewards.

## History

Crackers were invented by London confectioner Tom Smith, in 1847, as a development of his bon-bon sweets, which he sold in a twist of paper (the origins of the traditional sweet-wrapper). As sales of bon bons slumped, Smith began to come up with new promotional ideas. His first tactic was to insert mottos into the wrappers of the sweets (cf. Fortune cookies), but this had only limited success.

He was inspired to add the "crackle" element when he heard the crackle of a log he'd just put on the fire. The size of the plastic wrapper had to be increased to incorporate the banger mechanism, and the sweet itself was eventually dropped, to be replaced by a small gift. The new product was initially marketed as the Cosaque (i.e., Cossack), but the onomatopoeic "cracker" soon became the commonly used name, as rival varieties were introduced to the market.

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## Christmas customs in Poland

*Christmas* is the most widely celebrated holiday in Poland. Unlike other Christian countries, a greater emphasis is placed on Christmas Eve, or Wigilia in Polish meaning "a vigil" (from the Latin "wakefulness") than on Christmas day. Many Christian feast days include a vigil the day before.

Preparations for Christmas start with the Advent. This is an especially important time for religious Catholics.

All members at the dinner table share a thin wafer called *Oplatek*. Each member breaks off a piece of the *Oplatek* and says something they wish to happen to the person sitting next to them in the New Year.

The first course of the meal is a soup of some kind. The main dish served are pierogis. Pierogis are similar to ravioli. They are made from a dough consisting of flour, egg, and water. They are then stuffed with various fillings. Potatoes, noodles with poppy seeds, and fish are served with the pierogis. Dessert is then served.

After dinner gifts are exchanged and the family attends Midnight Mass or *Pasterka* ("Shepherds' Mass").

## See also

- [Wigilia](#) the Christmas Eve vigil supper
- [Christmas around the world](#)

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## Christmas customs in Romania

[Christmas](#) in Romania falls on December 25 and is generally considered one of the most important religious holiday. First comes [Easter](#).

The singing of [carols](#) is a very important part of Romanian Christmas festivities. On the first day of Christmas, many carolers walk through the streets of the towns and villages, holding a star made of cardboard and paper on which are depicted various scenes from the [Bible](#). Romanian tradition has the smallest children going from house to house, singing carols and reciting poems and legends during the whole Christmas season. The leader of the group carries with him a star made of wood, covered with metal foil and decorated with bells and coloured ribbons. An image of the Nativity is painted on the star's centre, and this piece of handiwork is attached to the end of a broom or other long stick.

### See also

- [Christmas around the world](#)

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## Christmas customs in the Philippines

The Philippines, a dominantly Catholic country, has earned the distinction of celebrating the world's longest [Christmas](#) season. [Christmas carols](#) are heard as early as September and it is only after Three Kings (first Sunday of the year) that the Christmas decorations are removed.

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- [2 Christmas Eve](#)
- [3 Christmas Day](#)
- [4 Niños Inocentes](#)
- [5 New Year's Eve \(Dec. 31\)](#)
- [6 Three Kings \(First Sunday of the year\)](#)
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### Misa de Gallo (Dec. 16-24)

Traditionally, Christmas Day in the Philippines is ushered in by the nine-day dawn masses that start on December 16. Known as the *Misa de Gallo* (Rooster's Mass) in the traditional Spanish, and these masses are also more popularly known in Filipino as *Simbang Gabi*, or "Night Mass". The *Simbang Gabi* is the most important Filipino Christmas tradition.

These nine dawn Masses are also considered as a Novena by the Catholic faithful. This refers to the Roman Catholic practice of performing nine days of private or public devotion to obtain special graces.

In some parishes, the *Simbang gabi* begins as early as four in the morning. Going to mass this early for nine consecutive days is meant to show the churchgoer's devotion to his faith and heighten anticipation for the Nativity of the Lord. In traditional Filipino belief, however, completing the novena is also supposed to mean that God would grant the devotee's special wish or favor.

After hearing Mass, Filipino families partake of traditional Philippine Christmas delicacies, either during breakfast at home or immediately outside the church, where they are sold. Vendors offer a wealth of native delicacies, including *bibingka* (rice and egg based cake, cooked using coals on top and under), *puto bumbong* (a purple sticky rice delicacy which is steamed in wooden tubes, with brown sugar and coconut shavings as condiments), *salabat* (hot ginger tea) and *tsokolate* (thick Spanish cocoa).

### Christmas Eve

For Filipinos, Christmas Eve on December 24 is the much-anticipated *Noche Buena* -- the traditional Christmas Eve feast after the midnight mass. Family members dine together around 12 midnight on traditional Noche Buena fare, which includes: *queso de bola* (Span. literally "ball of cheese"; edam cheese), "*Tsokolate*" (hot chocolate drink) and *hamon* (Christmas ham), and some would open presents at this time.

In different provinces and schools throughout the Philippines, Catholic devotees also reenact the journey of Joseph and the pregnant Blessed Virgin Mary in search of lodging for

the soon-to-be born Jesus Christ. This is the traditional *Panunuluyan*, also called *Pananawagan* and *Pananapatan*.

This street pageant is performed after dark on Christmas Eve, with the actors portraying Joseph and Mary going to pre-designated houses. They chant traditional songs which are meant to wake up the owner of the house as they ask for lodging, but are turned away by the owners, also in song. Finally, Joseph and Mary make their way to the parish church where a simulated manger has been set up. The birth of Jesus is celebrated at midnight with the *Misa de Gallo*, together with hallelujahs and Christmas carols.

## Christmas Day

[Christmas Day](#) in The Philippines is primarily a family affair. Prior to the ticking of 12 midnight on 25 December, *Misa de Aguinaldo* is being celebrated. It is usually attended by the whole family. *Misa de Aguinaldo* is the Holy Mass celebrated to signify the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines' main means of celebrating Jesus Christ's birth.

*Misa de Aguinaldo* is also celebrated at dawn or in the morning immediately after sunrise before 10 AM, this schedule is preferred by Filipinos who choose to celebrate Christmas Eve with a night-long celebration of *Noche Buena*.

Preferably in the morning, Filipino families visit members of the extended family, notably the elders in order to give their respect. This custom has been an age-old tradition in the Philippines called *Pagmamano*, this is done by touching one's forehead to the elder's hand saying *Mano Po*. The elder then blesses the person who payed respect. *Aguinaldo* or money in the form of crisp, fresh-from-the-bank bills is given after the *Pagmamano*, most usually to younger children. Although traditional in the country, some families no longer practice it.

A [Christmas](#) Lunch usually follows after the *Pagmamano*. The lunch is heavily depended upon the finances of the family. Financially stable families tend to prepare grand and glorious feasts that consist of *Jamon de Bola*, *Queso de Bola*, Lechon and other Filipino delicacies. Some economically less-fortunate families choose to cook simple meals, nevertheless still special. When the family is settled after the lunch, the exchange of gifts is usually done. Godparents are expected to give gifts or *Aguinaldo* to their godchildren.

When nighttime falls, members of the family usually take part in family talks while listening to favorite Christmas carols. Some may opt to have a glorious [Christmas](#) Feast for dinner.

## Niños Inocentes

*Niños Inocentes* is commemorated on December 28 as Holy Innocents' Day or Childermas in other countries. The innocents referred to are the children who were massacred by order of Herod, who was seeking the death of the newborn Messiah.



## New Year's Eve (Dec. 31)

On New Year's Eve ("*Bisperas ng Bagong taon*"), Filipino families gather for the *Media Noche* or midnight meal – a feast that is also supposed to symbolize their hopes for a prosperous New Year. In spite of the yearly ban on firecrackers, many Filipinos in the Philippines still see these as the traditional means to greet the New Year. The loud noises and sounds of merrymaking are not only meant to celebrate the coming of the New Year but are also supposed to drive away bad spirits. Safer methods of merrymaking include banging on pots and pans and blowing on car horns. Folk beliefs also include encouraging children to jump at the stroke of midnight so that they would grow up tall, displaying circular fruit and wearing clothes with dots and other circular designs to symbolize money, eating twelve grapes at 12 midnight for good luck in the twelve months of the year, and opening windows and doors during the first day of the New Year to let in the good luck.

## Three Kings (First Sunday of the year)

Christmas officially ends on the Feast of the Three Kings (*Tres Reyes* or *Tatlong Hari* in Tagalog), also known as the Feast of the [Epiphany](#). The Feast of the Three Kings was traditionally commemorated on Jan. 6 but is now celebrated on the first Sunday after the New Year. Some children leave their shoes out, so that the Three Kings would leave behind gifts like candy or money inside. Jan. 6 is also known in other countries as Twelfth Night, and the "[Twelve Days of Christmas](#)" referred to in the [Christmas carol](#) are the twelve days between Christmas Day (December 25) and the coming of the Three Kings (January 6).

## Decorations

The Filipino Christmas would not be complete without the traditional Philippine Christmas symbols and decorations. [Christmas lights](#) are strung about in festoons, as the tail of the Star of Bethlehem in *Belens*, in shapes like stars, [Christmas trees](#), angels, and in a large variety of other ways, even going as far as draping the whole outside of the house in lights. Aside from Western decorations like [Santa Claus](#), [Christmas trees](#), tinsel, etc, the Philippines has its own ways of showing that it is the holidays.

## Parol

Though not strictly a custom, every Christmas season, Filipino homes and buildings are adorned with beautiful star lanterns, called *parol* (Span. *farol*, meaning lantern or lamp-*Merriam Webster Spanish- English English- Spanish Dictionary*). The earliest parols were traditionally made from simple materials like bamboo sticks, Japanese rice paper (known as "*papel de Hapon*") or crepe paper, and a candle or coconut oil-lamp for illumination; although the present day parol can take many different shapes and forms. The parol is also traditionally made of lacquered paper and bamboo, but others are made of cellophane, plastic, rope, capiz shell and a wide variety of materials. Making parols is a folk craft, and most Filipino kids have tried their hand at making a parol at one time or another, maybe as a school project or otherwise. The most basic parol can be easily constructed with just ten



bamboo sticks, paper, and glue. These lanterns represent the Star of Bethlehem that guided the Magi, also known as the Three Wise Men or Three Kings (*Tatlong Hari* in Tagalog). Parols are to Filipinos as Christmas trees are to Westerners- an iconic symbol of the holiday.

## Belen

Another traditional Filipino Christmas symbol is the *belen* -- a creche or tableau representing the [Nativity scene](#). It depicts the infant Jesus Christ in the manger, surrounded by his parents, shepherds, their flock and the Magi. Belens can be seen in homes, churches, schools and even office buildings. The ones on office buildings can be extravagant, using different materials for the figures and using Christmas lights, parols, and painted background scenery. A notable outdoors belen in Manila is the one that used to be at the COD building in Cubao, Quezon City. In 2003, the belen was transferred to the Greenhills Shopping Center in San Juan when the COD building closed down. This belen is a lights and sounds presentation, the story being narrated over speakers set up and most probably using automatons to make the figures move up and down, or turn, etc. Each year, the company owning it changes the theme, with variations such as a fairground story, and [Santa Claus'](#) journey. Construction for this year's show started around September 1.

## Caroling

In the Philippines, children also celebrate Christmas with the traditional Christmas caroling --going from house to house singing Christmas carols. Makeshift instruments include tambourines made with *tansans* (aluminum bottle caps) strung on a piece of wire. With the traditional chant of "*Namamasko po!*", these carolers wait expectantly for the owner of the house to reward them with coins. After being rewarded, the carolers thank the owner by singing "Thank you, thank you, *ang babait ninyo* (you are so kind), thank you!"

An example of a carol sung is "*Sa may bahay ang aming bati*" (from Jim Ayson's *Maligayang Pasko!* Home Page.):

Sa maybahay ang aming bati Merry Christmas na maluwalhati!  
Ang pag-ibig pag siyang naghari  
Araw-araw ay magiging Paskong lagi!  
Chorus: Ang sanhi po ng pagparito, Hihingi po ng aginaldo.  
Kung sakali't kami'y perhuwisyo Pasensya na kayo pagka't kami'y namamasko!

Repeat all

*Translation:* At this house, our greeting is a glorious "Merry Christmas"! If Love reigns, everyday will be Christmas! The reason why we came here is to ask for gifts. If we're a bother, sorry, but were soliciting for gifts! ( "*Namamasko*" has no specific translation.)

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## Christmas dinner

**Christmas dinner** is the main meal traditionally eaten on [Christmas day](#). It is often seen as the main event of the day for which the family all gathers and eats together. In many ways the meal is similar to a standard Sunday dinner however the food is typically of higher quality and includes some extra items that are not a regular part of the meal such as sausage wrapped in bacon (known as Pigs in Blankets) and multiple kinds of potato (usually roast and mash). Christmas dinner's most famous feature is the turkey which occasionally is not only eaten but also makes up a centre piece on the table.

Christmas dinner also has other non-food related differences to Sunday dinner such as the use of the good cutlery, and the presence of [Christmas crackers](#) and the drinking of white wine.

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## Christmas dinner around the world

Christmas dinner around the world may differ and the traditions present here can reflect the culture of where this holiday is being celebrated. Turkey is featured in almost all of these meals.

### Australia

Due to Christmas falling in the heat of the Southern Hemisphere's summer, meats such as ham and chicken are usually served cold. Prawns (shrimp) is also common, as are barbequed cuts such as steak or chicken wings. Fruits of the season includes mango and cherries.

### Austria

Christmas cuisine in Austria is very similar to that of Germany because of a cultural and historical relationship between the two nations. Fried carp, and chocolate cake are among the common dishes in Austria during Christmas time.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Canada

In Canada, Christmas dinner is similar to that of its colonial ancestor, England, as well as to its neighbour the United States. Traditional Christmas dinner features turkey with stuffing (dressing), mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce, vegetables and pumpkin pie for dessert. [Eggnog](#), a milk-based punch that is often infused with alcohol, is also very popular around the holiday season. Other Christmas items include butter tarts and shortbread, which are traditionally baked before the holidays and served to visiting friends, at various Christmas and New Year parties, as well as on Christmas day.

## Eastern Europe

*Main article: [Twelve-dish Christmas Eve supper](#)*

In the areas of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (e.g. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania), an elaborate and ritualised meal of twelve meatless dishes is served. This is because the pre-Christmas season is a time of fasting, which will be broken on Christmas itself. As is typical of Slavic cultures, great pains are taken to honour the spirits of deceased relatives, including setting a place and dishing out food for them.

## Germany

In Germany common dishes are roast goose, macaroni salad, [marzipan](#), porridge (*reisbrei*), spice bars (*lebkuchen*), [stollen](#) (several types of bread, including *Christstollen*, Dresden stollen, etc.), sucking pig, white sausage.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Mexico

In Mexico the Christmas dinner is significantly more organic with an emphasis on fruits and vegetables. Common dishes are various fruits (oranges, limes, tropical fruits), salad (composed of several ingredients including jícamas, beets, bananas, and peanuts).

## United Kingdom

Christmas dinner in the United Kingdom usually consists of [brandy butter](#), bread sauce, [Christmas pudding](#) (or *plum sauce*), [cranberry sauce](#), roast turkey, roast vegetables, stuffing (or dressing, as it is more informally known in North America).<sup>[3]</sup>

In England, the evolution of the main course into turkey did not take place for years, or even centuries. At first, in Medieval England, the main course was either a peacock or a boar, the boar usually the mainstay. After the French Jesuits imported the turkey into Great Britain, it became the main course in the 1700s.<sup>[3]</sup>

A common tradition in the United Kingdom is to use the turkey's wishbone to make a wish. A mutual pair will usually pull at the two opposite ends of the wishbone with the person breaking the larger portion of the bone making a wish.<sup>[3]</sup>

## United States

Many Christmas customs that take place in the United States have been adopted from those in the United Kingdom.<sup>[4]</sup> As such, the mainstays of the English table are much the same in the United States; cranberry sauce, turkey, stuffing, [pumpkin pie](#), and green beans are all very common. Corn is also a holiday favorite, used during Thanksgiving also to celebrate the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620. Regional meals vary from one to another, the South has grits and Whiskey cake, Hawaii has Turkey teriyaki, Virginia has oysters and ham pie, and so on.<sup>[5]</sup> Another tradition with holiday meals in the United States is grace.

## References

1. [^ Holiday Traditions — Austria](#). Retrieved 1 July 2006.
2. [^ Holiday Traditions — Germany](#). Retrieved 1 July 2006.
3. [^ a b c Christmas dinner in England](#). Retrieved 1 July 2006.
4. [^ Holiday Traditions — England](#). Retrieved 1 July 2006.
5. [^ Holiday Traditions — United States](#). Retrieved 1 July 2006.

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# Christmas tree

A **Christmas tree** is one of the most popular traditions associated with the celebration of [Christmas](#). It is normally an evergreen coniferous tree that is brought into a home or used in the open, and is decorated with [Christmas lights](#) and colourful [ornaments](#) during the days around Christmas.

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## Dates

Traditionally, Christmas trees were not brought in and decorated until [Christmas Eve](#) (24 December), and then removed the day after [twelfth night](#) (i.e., 6 January); to have a tree up before or after these dates was even considered bad luck. Modern commercialisation of Christmas has however resulted in trees being put up much earlier; in shops often as early as late October (in the UK, Selfridge's Christmas department is up by early September, complete with Christmas trees). A common tradition in U.S. homes is to put the tree up right after Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday in November) and to take it down right after the New Year. However, some households in the U.S. do not put up the tree until the second week of December, and leave it up until the 6th of January. In Germany, Catholics take their Christmas trees down by the 2nd of February.

## Types of trees used

Both natural and artificial trees are used as Christmas trees.

## Natural trees

The best species for use are species of fir (*Abies*), which have the major benefit of not shedding the needles when they dry out, as well as good foliage colour and scent; but species in other genera are also used. Commonly used species in northern Europe are:

- Silver Fir *Abies alba* (the original species)
- Nordmann Fir *Abies nordmanniana* (as in the photo)
- Noble Fir *Abies procera*
- Norway Spruce *Picea abies* (generally the cheapest)
- Serbian Spruce *Picea omorika*
- Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*

and in North America:

- Balsam Fir *Abies balsamea*
- Fraser Fir *Abies fraseri*
- Grand Fir *Abies grandis*
- Noble Fir *Abies procera*
- Red Fir *Abies magnifica*
- Douglas-fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*
- Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*
- Stone Pine *Pinus pinea* (as small table-top trees)

Several other species are used to a lesser extent. Less-traditional conifers are sometimes used, such as Giant Sequoia, Leyland Cypress and Eastern Juniper. Blue spruce can also be used as a Christmas tree, but has very sharp needles, making decorating uncomfortable. Virginia Pine is still available on some tree farms in the southeastern United States, however its winter colour is faded. The long-needled Eastern White Pine is also used there. Norfolk Island pine is sometimes used, particularly in the Oceania region, and in Australia some species of the genera *Casuarina* and *Allocasuarina* are also occasionally used as Christmas trees.

Some trees are sold live with roots and soil, often from a nursery, to be planted later outdoors and enjoyed (and often decorated) for years or decades. However, the combination of root loss on digging, and the indoor environment of high temperature and low humidity is very detrimental to the tree's health, and the survival rate of these trees is low. These trees must be kept inside only for a few days, as the warmth will bring them out of dormancy, leaving them little protection when put back outside into the midwinter cold in most areas. Others are produced in a container and sometimes as topiary for a porch or patio.

European tradition prefers the open aspect of naturally-grown, unsheared trees, while in North America (outside western areas where trees are often wild-harvested on public lands) there is a preference for close-sheared trees with denser foliage, but less space to hang decorations. The shearing also damages the highly attractive natural symmetry of unsheared trees. In the past, Christmas trees were often harvested from wild forests, but now almost all are commercially grown on tree farms.

Almost all Christmas trees in the United States are grown on Christmas tree farms where they are cut after about ten years of growth and new trees planted. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agriculture census for 2002 (the census is done

every five years) there were 21,904 farms were producing conifers for the cut Christmas Tree market in America, 446,996 acres were planted in Christmas Trees, and 13,849 farms harvested cut trees. The top 5 percent of the farms (100 acres or more) sold 61 percent of the trees. The top 26 percent of the farms (20 acres or more) sold 84 percent of the trees. 21% of the farms were less than two acres and sold an average of 115 trees per farm.

In the UK, The British Christmas Tree Growers Association represents the interests of all those who grow Christmas trees in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

## **Artificial trees**

Artificial trees have become increasingly popular, as they are considered more convenient and (if used for several years) less expensive than real trees. Trees come in a number of colours and "species", and some come pre-decorated with lights. At the end of the Christmas season artificial trees can be disassembled and stored compactly.

Artificial trees are sometimes even a necessity in some rented homes (especially apartment flats), due to the potential fire danger from a dried-out real tree, leading to their prohibition by some landlords [citation needed]. They may also be necessary for people who have an allergy to conifers, and are increasingly popular in office settings.

## **Feather trees**

The first artificial trees were tabletop *feather trees*, made from green-dyed goose feathers wound onto sticks drilled into a larger one, like the branches on a tree. Originating in Germany in the 19th century to prevent further deforestation, these "minimalist" trees show off small ornaments very well. The first feather trees came to the U.S. in 1913, in the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalog.

## **Modern trees**

The first modern artificial Christmas trees were produced by companies which made brushes. They were made the same way, using animal hair (mainly pig bristles) and later plastic bristles, dyed pine-green colour, inserted between twisted wires that form the branches. The bases of the branches were then twisted together to form a large branch, which was then inserted by the user into a wooden pole (now metal with plastic rings) for a trunk. Each row of branches is a different size, colour coded at the base with paint or stickers for ease of assembly.

The first trees looked like long-needled pine trees, but later trees use flat PVC sheets to make the needles. Many also have very short brown "needles" wound in with the longer green ones, to imitate the branch itself or the bases that each group of pine (but not other conifer) needles grows from. These trees have become a little more realistic every year, with a few deluxe trees containing multiple branch styles. Many trees now come in "slim" versions, to fit in smaller spaces. Most of the better trees have branches hinged to the pole, though the less-expensive ones generally still come separately. The hinged branched trees just need for the branches to be lowered. But they are a little less compact. Better trees also have more branch tips, the number usually listed on the box.

Around 2003, some trees with moulded plastic branches started selling in the U.S. Now there are also upside down christmas trees. These christmas trees are advertised to "Give you more space for presents".

## **Designer trees**

The first trees which were not green were the metallic trees of the 1950s and 1960s. They were aluminium-coated paper, meaning that they also posed a great fire hazard if lights were put directly on them (warnings to this effect are still issued with most christmas tree lights). They were instead lit by a spotlight or floodlight, often with a motorised rotating color wheel in front of it. More recent tinsel trees can be used safely with lights.

Other artificial trees which look nothing like a conifer except for the triangular or conical shape, are also used as tabletop decorations, such as a stack of ornaments.

## **Outdoor trees**

Outdoor branched trees made out of heavy white-enameled steel wires have become more popular on U.S. lawns in the 2000s, along with 1990s spiral ones that hang from a central pole, both styles being lighted with standard miniature lights. These lights are usually white, but often are green, red, red/green, blue/white, blue, or multicoloured, and sometimes with a small controller to fade colours back and forth.

A few hotels and other buildings, both public and private, will string lights up from the roof to the top of a small tower on top of the building, so that at night it appears as a lit Christmas tree, often using green or other coloured lights. Some skyscrapers will tell certain offices to leave their lights on (and others off) at night during December, creating a Christmas tree pattern.

## **Other gimmicks**

Since the late 1990s, many indoor artificial trees come pre-strung with lights. Some are instead lit partly or completely by fibre optics, with the light in the base, and a rotating colour wheel causing various colours to shimmer across the tree.

In 2005 inverted trees became popular. They were originally sold as decorations for merchants that allowed customers to get closer to ornaments being sold. Customers then wanted to replicate the inverted tree. Retailers also claimed that the trees were popular because they allowed larger presents to be placed beneath the trees.

Past gimmicks include small talking or singing trees, and trees which blow "snow" (actually small styrofoam beads) over themselves, collecting them in a decorative cardboard bin at the bottom and blowing them back up to the top through a tube hidden next to the trunk.

A long-standing and simple gimmick is conifer seedlings sold with cheap decorations attached by soft pipe cleaners. Real potted ones are often sold like this, and artificial ones often come with a "root ball" but only sometimes with decorations.

## **Environmental issues**



There is some debate as to whether artificial or real trees are better for the natural environment. Artificial trees are usually made out of PVC, a toxic material which is often stabilised with lead. Some trees have a warning that dust or leaves from the tree should not be eaten or inhaled. A small amount of real-tree material is used in some artificial trees. For instance, the bark of a real tree can be used to surface an artificial trunk. Polyethylene trees are less toxic, though more expensive, than PVC trees.

Artificial trees can be used for many years, but are usually non-recyclable, ending up in landfills. Real trees are used only for a short time, but can be recycled and used as mulch or used to prevent erosion [4]. Real trees also help reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere while growing.

Live trees are typically grown as a crop and replanted in rotation after cutting, often providing suitable habitat for wildlife. In some cases management of Christmas tree crops can result in poor habitat since it involves heavy input of pesticides. Organically grown Christmas trees are available in some markets, and as with many other crops, are widely held to be better for the environment. Dr. Patrick Moore, a co-founder and former president of Greenpeace, writes:

*Whether you choose a cut or growing tree to enjoy this holiday season, I believe that a sensible environmentalist would opt for renewable over non-renewable every time.*

## **Decoration and ornaments**

Tinsel and several types of garland or ribbon are commonly used to decorate a Christmas tree. Delicate mould-blown and painted coloured glass Christmas ornaments were a specialty of Czech glass factories from the late 19th century, and have since become a large industry, complete with famous-name designers. Lighting with candles or electric lights (fairy lights) is commonly done, and a tree topper completes the ensemble. Strands of tinsel may be hung in groups from longer branches to simulate icicles, though this trend has gradually fallen off since the late 1970s. Baubles are another extremely common decoration, and usually consist of a fairly small hollow glass or plastic sphere coated with a thin metallic layer to make them reflective, and then with a further coating of a thin pigmented polymer in order to provide colouration.

Individuals' decorations vary wildly, typically being an eclectic mix of family traditions and personal tastes; even a small unattractive ornament, if passed down from a parent or grandparent, may come to carry considerable emotional value and be given pride of place on the tree. Conversely, trees decorated by professional designers for department stores and other institutions will usually have a "theme"; a set of predominant colours, multiple instances of each type of ornament, and larger decorations that may be more complicated to set up correctly.

Many people also decorate outdoor trees with food that birds and other wildlife will enjoy, such as garlands made from unsalted popcorn or cranberries, orange halves, and seed-covered suet cakes.

## **Tree mats and skirts**



A tree of pointsettias in San Diego

Since candles were used to light trees until electric bulbs came about, a mat (UK) or "skirt" (US) was often placed on the floor below the tree to protect it by catching the dripping candle wax, and also to collect any needles that fall. Even when dripless candles, electric lights and artificial trees have been used, a skirt is still usually used as a decorative feature: among other things, it hides the tree stand, which may be unsightly but which is an important safety feature of home trees. What began as ordinary cloth has now often become much more ornate, some having embroidery or being put together like a quilt.

A nativity scene, model train, or Christmas village may be placed on the mat or skirt. As Christmas presents arrive, they are generally placed underneath the tree on the tree skirt (depending on tradition, all Christmas gifts, or those too large to be hung on the tree, as in "presents on the tree" of the song "I'll Be Home For Christmas").

Generally, the difference between a mat and skirt is simply that a mat is placed *under* the tree stand, while a skirt is placed *over* it, having a hole in the middle for the trunk, with a slot cut to the outside edge so that it can be placed around the tree (beneath the branches) easily. A plain mat of fabric or plastic may also be placed under the stand and skirt to protect the floor from scratches or water.

## Flocking

In the 1980s some trees were sprayed with fluffy white flocking to simulate snow. Typically it would be sprayed all over the tree from the sides, which produced a look different from real snow, which settles in clumps atop branches. Flocking can be done with a

professional sprayer at a tree lot (or the manufacturer if it is artificial), or at home from a spray can, and either can be rather messy. This tradition seems to be limited mostly to the United States.

## History



Dionysus in his Triumphant Return; behind the god, Victoria holds an evergreen.

The Christmas tree is often explained as a Christianization of the ancient pagan idea that the evergreen tree represents a celebration of the renewal of life. In Roman mosaics from what is today Tunisia, showing the mythic triumphant return from India of the Greek god of wine and male fertility, Dionysus (dubbed by some modern scholars as a life-death-rebirth deity), the god carries a tapering coniferous tree. Medieval legends, nevertheless, tended to concentrate more on the miraculous "flowering" of trees at Christmas time. A branch of flowering Glastonbury thorn is still sent annually for the Queen's Christmas table in the United Kingdom.

Patron trees (for example, the Irminsul, Thor's Oak and the figurative Yggdrasil) held special significance for the ancient Germanic tribes, appearing throughout historic accounts as sacred symbols and objects. Among early Germanic tribes the Yule tradition was celebrated by sacrificing male animals and slaves by suspending them on the branches of trees. According to Adam of Bremen, in Scandinavia the pagan kings sacrificed nine males of each species at the sacred groves every ninth year. According to one legend, Saint Boniface attempted to introduce the idea of trinity to the pagan tribes using the cone-shaped evergreen trees because of their triangular appearance.



Taiwanese aboriginals, tutored by Christian missionaries, celebrate with trees (*Cunninghamia lanceolata*) outside their homes.

The modern custom, however, although likely related, cannot be proven to be directly descended from pagan tradition. It can be traced to 16th century Germany; Ingeborg Weber-Keller (Marburg professor of European ethnology) identified as the earliest reference a Bremen guild chronicle of 1570 which reports how a small fir was decorated with apples, nuts, dates, pretzels and paper flowers, and erected in the guild-house, for the benefit of the guild members' children, who collected the dainties on Christmas day. Another early reference is from Basel, where the taylor apprentices carried around town a tree decorated with apples and cheese in 1597. The city of Riga, Latvia claims to be home of the first holiday tree, an octagonal plaque in the town square reads "The First New Years Tree in Riga in 1510", in eight different languages. During the 17th century, the custom entered family homes. One Strasbourg priest, Johann Konrad Dannerhauer, complains about the custom as distracting from the word of God. By the early 18th century, the custom had become common in towns of the upper Rhineland, but it had not yet spread to rural areas. Wax candles are attested from the late 18th century. The Christmas tree remained confined to the upper Rhineland for a relatively long time. It was regarded as a Protestant custom by the Catholic majority along the lower Rhine, and was spread there only by Prussian officials who were moved there in the wake of the Congress of Vienna in 1815. In the early 19th century, the custom became popular among the nobility and spread to royal courts as far as Russia. Princess Henrietta von Nassau-Weilburg introduced the Christmas tree to Vienna in 1816, and the custom spread across Austria in the following years. In France, the first Christmas tree was introduced in 1840 by the duchess of Orleans.

In Britain, the Christmas tree was introduced by King George III's German Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, but did not spread much beyond the royal family. Queen

Victoria as a child was familiar with the custom, in her journal for Christmas Eve 1832, the delighted 13-year-old Princess wrote: "After dinner...we then went into the drawing-room near the dining-room...There were two large round tables on which were placed two trees hung with lights and sugar ornaments. All the presents being placed round the trees...". After her marriage to her German cousin, Prince Albert, the custom became even more widespread. In 1847, Prince Albert wrote: "I must now seek in the children an echo of what Ernest [his brother] and I were in the old time, of what we felt and thought; and their delight in the Christmas-trees is not less than ours used to be". The generous Prince Albert also presented large numbers of trees to schools and army barracks at Christmas. Images of the royal family with their Christmas tree at Osborne House were illustrated in English magazines, initially as a woodcut in the *Illustrated London News* of December 1848, and copied in the United States at Christmas 1850 (*illustration, left*). Such patriotic prints of the British royal family at Christmas celebrations helped popularise the Christmas tree in Britain and among the anglophile American upper class.

There are several cities in the United States which lay claim to that country's first Christmas tree. Windsor Locks, Connecticut claims that a Hessian soldier put up a Christmas tree in 1777 while imprisoned at the Noden-Reed House, thus making it the home of the first Christmas tree in New England. The "First Christmas Tree in America" is also claimed by Easton, Pennsylvania, where German settlers purportedly erected a Christmas tree in 1816.

Many cities, towns, and department stores put up public Christmas trees outdoors for everyone to enjoy, such as the Rich's Great Tree in Atlanta, the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree in New York City and the large Christmas tree at Victoria Square in Adelaide. During the 1970's and 1980's, the largest Christmas tree in the world was put up every year on the property of The National Enquirer in Lantana, Florida. This tradition grew into one of the most spectacular and celebrated events in the history of south Florida. Unfortunately, this annual affair was discontinued upon the death of the papers founder in the late 1980's.

In some cities festivals are organised around the decoration and display of multiple trees as charity events. In some cases the trees represent special commemorative gifts, such as in Trafalgar Square in London where the City of Oslo presents a tree to the people of London as a token of appreciation for the British support of Norwegian resistance during the Second World War; in Boston where the tree is a gift from the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, in thanks for rapid deployment of supplies and rescuers to the 1917 ammunition ship explosion that leveled Halifax harbor; and in Newcastle upon Tyne, where the 15 m tall main civic Christmas tree is an annual gift from the city of Bergen, Norway in thanks for the part played by soldiers from Newcastle in liberating Bergen from Nazi occupation.

The United States' National Christmas Tree is lit each year south of the White House in Washington, D.C. Today, the lighting of the National Tree is part of what has become a major holiday event at the White House. President Jimmy Carter only lit the crowning star atop the Tree in 1979 in honor of the Americans being held hostage in Iran; in 1980, the tree was only fully lit for 417 seconds, one second for each day the hostages had been in captivity.

The term *Charlie Brown Christmas tree* can be used to described any sad-looking, malformed little tree. Some tree buyers intentionally adopt such trees, feeling sympathetic to their plights. The term comes from the appearance of Charlie Brown's Christmas tree in the [TV special](#) *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

## Name controversy

The term **holiday tree** has, since at least 1990 (and perhaps before), been used by some in the United States and Canada as an effort to be more inclusive, and to reflect the winter holiday season instead of any specific religious holiday. A recent campaign spearheaded by Fox News' contributors Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity has resulted in a backlash from some Christian groups and individuals who feel the designation "holiday tree" is part of a so-called war on Christmas.

## Usage controversy

Some Christians, albeit a minority, feel that the practice of having "Christmas Trees" is prohibited by the Book of Jeremiah 10:1-5 which says,

For the customs of the people [are] vain: for [one] cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. KJV.

Interpreting those verses as a ban on Christmas trees may be more common among individuals and Christian denominations that are part of the King-James-Only Movement.

In other English translations of the Bible the verses more explicitly refer to the practice of making idols to be worshipped:

For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a *craftsman shapes it with his chisel*. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with a hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; *they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them*; they can do no harm nor can they do any good. (emphasis added) NIV

A full study of the passage shows that the people would cut down a tree and work it with a chisel to engrave an image in it. They would also carry it from place to place as an object to be feared and worshipped. The only consistencies with Christmas tree customs seem to be that both are made of wood and both are decorated.

Some Christians, again a minority, feel that since "Christmas Trees" are not biblically ordained, they should not be used. Such individuals and Christian denominations are unlikely to celebrate [Christmas](#) at all, for the same reason, such as the United Church of God.

Some churches use the same stripped Christmas tree as a Christian cross at [Easter](#). This is comparable to the Old English poem The Dream of the Rood.

## See also

- [American Christmas traditions](#)
- [German Christmas traditions](#)

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# Christmas worldwide

The [Christmas](#) season is celebrated in different ways around the world.

- The list of winter festivals includes winter holidays not specifically related to Christmas.
- This page focuses on traditions in countries other than the United Kingdom, Australia and North America. See [Christmas](#), [Santa Claus](#), and [American Christmas traditions](#) for more information about those traditions.

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## Asia

### India

Christmas is an official holiday in India. The celebration by Christians is largely based on the American media depiction. Sincere devotees attend the church services. In many of the schools that are run by the Christian missionaries, the Hindu children actively participate in the programmes. This involves enacting dramas related to Christ, singing carols etc. Christmas is officially celebrated at the Rashtrapati Bhavan by the President of India. The celebrations continue and get mixed up with new year celebrations.

In India, most educational institutions have a Christmas vacation, beginning shortly before Christmas and ending a few days after New Year's Day. Christmas is also known as bada din (the big day) in Hindi, and revolves there around [Santa Claus](#) and shopping.

### Korea

South Korea recognizes Christmas as a public holiday. Non-Christian Koreans otherwise go about their daily routine on December 25 but may engage in some holiday customs such as gift-giving, sending Christmas cards, and setting up decorated trees in their homes; children, especially, appear to have embraced Santa Claus, whom they call Santa Harabeoji (Grandfather Santa) in Korean. Local radio stations play holiday music on Christmas Day and a few days before, while television stations are known to air Christmas films and cartoon specials popular in the Western countries. In addition, increasing numbers of stores and buildings are displaying Christmas decorations.

As in the West, Christian churches in Korea hold Christmas pageants and conduct special services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Young people especially enjoy the fellowship these observances provide; after the Christmas Eve services, for example, they go caroling to the homes of older church members, where they are usually treated to hot drinks and snacks.

South Korea is the only East Asian country to recognise [Christmas](#) as a public holiday.

### Japan

Encouraged by the commercial sector, the secular celebration of Christmas is popular in Japan, though Christmas is not a national holiday. The Japanese adopted the character of Santa Claus in their celebrations, but the Santa image does not carry the same social importance as in the United States. Christmas is not as important as New Year's Day, which is the most sacred holiday in Japan, whereas Christmas is not a holiday at all. In contrast to western customs, Christmas Eve is a day for couples to date and groups to hold parties, while the official New Year's Day holiday is a day of family celebration. Christmas Eve is a time for lovers to exchange gifts, have a special date and stroll under Christmas lights erected by companies and governments to enhance the romantic feel of the day. All Christmas theme decorations come down on the 25th and are replaced by New Year's decorations. A unique feature of Christmas in Japan is the [Christmas cake](#), a white whipped cream cake with strawberries.

The first Christmas in Japan was believed to have been celebrated during the late Edo period by Dutch merchants living in Nagasaki, with local officials and those who worked with the merchants joining the party. In the Meiji period, as spreading of Christian teachings was authorized, churches held their Christmas masses. In upper circles, heavily influenced by American customs, Christmas parties were held and presents were exchanged. The practice slowly spread in major cities, but its proximity to the New Year's celebrations makes it a significantly smaller focus of attention. During World War II, all celebrations and customs, especially those from America, were avoided and suppressed. From the 1960s, with the aid of a rapidly expanding economy, and influenced by American TV dramas, Christmas became popular, but not as a religious occasion. For many Japanese, celebrating Christmas is similar to participating in a matsuri, where participants often do not consider which kami is being celebrated, but believe that the celebration is a tribute nevertheless. From the 1970s to the 1980s, many songs and TV drama series presented Christmas from a lover's point of view.

The birthday of the current emperor, Akihito, on December 23 is a national holiday. Christmas itself is not, but shortly thereafter businesses close for the New Year's holidays, usually reopening on the first weekday after January 3.

## **People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Macao**

In Mainland China, December 25 is not a legal holiday. Christians unofficially and usually privately observe Christmas.

Both Hong Kong and Macao designate Christmas as a public holiday on December 25. Both are former colonies of Western powers with (nominal) Christian cultural heritage.

However, it is worthy of note that commercial Christmas decorations, signs, and other symbolic items have become increasingly prevalent during the month of December in large urban centers of mainland China, reflecting a cultural interest in this Western phenomenon, and, sometimes, as part of retail marketing schemes.

## **Philippines**

*Main article: [Christmas customs in the Philippines](#)*

The Philippines has earned the distinction of celebrating the world's longest Christmas season. Although it presently starts from early September, traditionally, Christmas Day in the Philippines is ushered in by the nine-day dawn masses that start on Dec. 16. Known as the Misa de Aguinaldo (Gift Masses) or Misa de Gallo (Rooster's Mass) in the traditional Spanish, these masses are more popularly known in Filipino as the Simbang Gabi. Christmas Eve on Dec. 24 is the much-anticipated "noche buena" -- the traditional Christmas feast after the midnight mass. Family members dine together on traditional noche buena fare, which includes the queso de bola ("ball of cheese", usually edam) and hamon (Christmas ham). In the capital Manila, Christmas Day is the start of the annual Metro Manila Film Festival where most film outfits produce fantasy movies. Usually, aside from Rizal Day (December 30) and New Year's Eve (December 31), Christmas Eve (December 24), Niños Inocentes (December 28), and the Epiphany (traditionally, January 6) are also declared as holidays as part of the Christmas celebration. In Asia, Christmas is also the liveliest in the Philippines, since the

country is the only predominantly Christian nation in the continent besides, Russia, East Timor, Georgia and Armenia.

## **Republic of China (Taiwan)**

In the Republic of China (Taiwan), Christmas is not officially celebrated. However, coincidentally, December 25 is the date of the signing of the Constitution of the Republic of China in 1947, officially the Constitution Day (L<sup>2</sup>õå). Hence there was already an official holiday on that date, which is largely, though unofficially, treated as if it were Christmas. In order to avoid having too many legal holidays when phasing in two-day-off-per-week plan, the Constitution Day is no longer a full legal holiday with a day off. Some people have become disappointed that December 25 has ceased to be a holiday, but there are still unofficial celebrations of Christmas.

However, as in many East Asian countries, secular Christmas displays are common both in business establishments and in public, including lights, Christmas trees, depictions of Santa Claus, and Christmas greetings in English and Chinese. Occasionally such displays are left in place even in summer.

## **The Americas**

### **Mexico**

Mexico's Christmas traditions are centered on [\*posadas\*](#). Over a nine day period, groups of townspeople go from door to door, in a fashion reminiscent of visitors to the baby Jesus, and are periodically called inside homes to participate in the breaking of a gift-filled piñata.

### **United States and Canada**

*Further information:* [\*American Christmas traditions\*](#)

In the United States and Canada, the Santa Claus traditions are essentially the same, except in Quebec, where the Père Noël ("[Father Christmas](#)" in French), may appear.

### **South America**

Religious themes predominate in Christmas celebrations in heavily Roman Catholic South America. The secular customs and gift-giving in these countries are an admixture of traditions handed down from European and Native American forebears, plus the increasing influence of American culture.

Gift giving traditions include "El Niño Jesus" (Baby Jesus) who brings gifts to children in Colombia, Chile's "Viejo Pascuero" (Old Man Christmas), and Brazil's "Papai Noel", the latter two resembling Santa Claus in many ways. South American "Santas" dress more lightly in keeping with the warmer Christmas there, and have adopted a number of means, from ladders to trampolines, to enter homes at night. Gift giving in Argentina occurs on January 6,

their "Three Kings Day", when children leave shoes under their beds to be filled with snacks or small gifts by the Magi, who stop off on their way to Bethlehem.

[Nativity scenes](#) are a strong feature of South American Christmas, both in homes and in public places. In regions with large numbers of Native American descendants, such as Peru, the figures are often hand-carved in a centuries-old style. As in Mexico, village processions acting out the events surrounding the birth of Christ are also common. Family Christmas meals are very important, and their contents are as varied as the number of countries on the continent. Christmas lights are a near-universal holiday feature, and with the summery weather, fireworks displays are also found, especially over the cities of Brazil.

## Australia

In Commonwealth countries in the southern hemisphere, Christmas is celebrated on 25 December which falls during the height of the summer season there. The Australian traditions are quite similar to those of North America and Britain, and similar wintry iconography is commonplace. This results in such incongruities as a red fur-coated [Father Christmas](#) riding a sleigh, carols such as *Jingle Bells*, and various snow covered Christmas scenes on Christmas cards and decorations appearing in the middle of a hot summer.

As Christmas falls in summer, the watching of television is not a strong part of Australian Christmas traditions, unlike the UK where it is one of the most important television ratings days. In Australia over summer official television ratings are not taken and schedules are mostly filled with repeats of old programs or previously cancelled shows. Some Australia-produced programs have a Christmas special though often it will be shown early December and not on Christmas day itself.

According to tradition, children are told Father Christmas surreptitiously visits houses on Christmas Eve placing presents for children under the Christmas trees and putting sweets in stockings which are usually hung by a fireplace. In recent decades most homes and apartments do not have traditional combustion fireplaces, but, with some innovation, the tradition persists.

A Christmas tradition that started in Melbourne in 1938 and has since spread around the world is [Carols by Candlelight](#), where people gather, usually outdoors, to sing carols by candlelight on [Christmas Eve](#) or other evening shortly before Christmas.

Traditionally, extended families would gather for a Christmas lunch similar to a traditional English Christmas meal including roast turkey, roast vegetables, hams, followed by mince pies and plum pudding. More recently, as appropriate to the typically-hot weather on the day, lighter meals featuring fish and seafood may be served, along with barbecue lunches.

Special events for international tourists away from their families are held on Bondi Beach in Sydney, often involving a turkey barbecue, and such humorous stunts as "Santa" surfing in to appear to the crowd.

## Europe

### Central Europe

In countries of Central Europe (for this purpose, roughly defined as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, and possibly other places) the main celebration date for the general public is Christmas Eve (December 24th). The day is usually a fasting day; in some places children are told they'll see a golden pig if they hold fast until dinner. When the evening comes preparation of Christmas Dinner starts. Traditions concerning dinner vary from region to region, for example in the Czech Republic the prevailing meal is fried carp with potato salad and fish soup. However, in some places the tradition is porridge with mushrooms (a modest dish), and elsewhere the dinner is exceptionally rich, with up to 12 dishes.

What's common is that people usually stay in close family circle. Staying alone during Christmas Eve is considered very sad, and many families "bring home" their grandparents at least for Christmas.

After the dinner comes the time for gifts. Tradition varies with region, commonly gifts are attributed to [Christkind](#) (Little Jesus) or their real originators (e.g. parents). Children usually find their gifts under the Christmas Tree, with name stickers. An interesting example of complicated history of the region is the "fight" between Christmas beings. During communism, when slavic countries of Central Europe were under Soviet influence, communist authorities strongly pushed Russian traditional *Ded Moroz* ("Grandfather Frost") in the place of *Christkind*. Little Jesus won. Now [Santa Claus](#) is attacking, by means of advertising and Hollywood film production.

Many people, Christians as well as people with just a Christian background, go to Roman Catholic churches for Midnight Mass. It's not uncommon to go to a church only one time a year, for this Christmas Mass.

Other attributes of Christmas include [Christmas trees](#), mistletoe, Christmas garlands, Bethlehem Cribs.

### Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, Christmas is celebrated mainly on December 24, or Christmas Eve - Štědrý den (pron. "Shtiedree den", means "open-handed day") when the gifts are given in the evening. However, the December 25 and 26 are also free days. According to tradition, gifts are brought by Ježíšek (pron. "Yezheeshek"), or "little Jesus". Many very old Christmas traditions are followed, mostly for fun. People are taught not to eat anything on Christmas Eve until a ceremonial dinner is served, in order to be able to see a "golden pig". The gifts are displayed under the Christmas tree (usually a spruce or pine), and people open them after the dinner.

Other Czech Christmas traditions involve predictions for the future. Apples are always cut crosswise; if a star appears in the core, the next year will be successful, while a cross suggests a bad year. Girls throw shoes over their shoulders; if the toe points to the door,

the girl will get married. Another tradition requires pouring a little molten lead into water and guessing a message from the shapes that appear when it hardens.

## Poland

*Main article: [Christmas customs in Poland](#)*

In Poland, Christmas Eve is a day first of fasting, then of feasting. The feast begins with the appearance of the first star, and is followed by the exchange of gifts. The following day is often spent visiting friends. Poland is a land of intriguing traditions, superstitions, and legends. Its people have always combined religion and family closeness at Christmas time. Gift giving plays only a minor role in the rituals, emphasis being placed instead on making special foods and decorations. Traditionally, Advent is an important season in the Polish year, with special church services, known as Roraty, being held every morning at 6am. The four Sundays of Advent are said to represent the 4,000 years of waiting for Christ. During Advent and, in some homes, on Christmas Eve, bee's wax is poured on water, and fortunes are told from the shapes, which emerge. Special tasks carried out during Advent are the baking of the Christmas piernik or honey cake, and the making of Christmas decorations. Pierniki are made in a great variety of shapes, including hearts, animals and St Nicholas figures. Traditional decorations include the pajaki or spiders, which are handmade mobiles, stars and decorated eggshells. Beautifully lit Christmas trees are placed in all public arenas, outside churches and in homes. Traditionally the trees are decorated with shiny apples, walnuts, beautifully wrapped chocolate shapes and many homemade decorations and candles. On the top of the tree is a star or a glittering top piece. In many homes, sparklers are hung on the branches of the trees giving it a magical air. Sometimes the trees are left standing until February 2nd, the feast day of St Mary of the Candle of Lightning. During Advent, the Gwiadorzy or star carriers, used to begin wandering through the towns and villages and this would continue until Epiphany. Some of the Gwiadorzy sang carols; others recited verses or put on Szopki or puppet show, or herody or nativity scenes. The last two customs are developments from traditional manger scenes or Jaselka or crib. One tradition unique to Poland is the sharing the "oplatek," a thin wafer into which is pressed a holy picture. People once carried these oplatek from house to house to wish their neighbors a Merry Christmas. Nowadays, the bread is mostly shared with members of the family and immediate neighbors. As each person shares pieces of the wafer with another person, they are supposed to forgive any hurts that have occurred over the past year and to wish the other person all the happiness in the coming year.

On Christmas Eve, so important is the first star of the night that it has been given the affectionate name of "little star" or Gwiazdka, in remembrance of the Star of Bethlehem. On that night, all watch the sky anxiously, hoping to be the first to cry out, "The star!" The moment the star appears, people start eating. Families unite for the most carefully planned meal of the year, Wigilia, the Christmas supper. The Wigilia derives its name from the Latin word vigilare, which means to watch or keep vigil.

According to tradition, bits of hay have been spread beneath the tablecloth as a reminder that Christ was born in a manger. An even number of people must be seated around the table or tradition states someone may die in the coming year. Wigilia is a family feast and it's considered bad luck to entertain a guest on this sacred night. In some places an empty place



setting is left at the table for the Baby Jesus or a wanderer who can come in need. The meal begins with the breaking of the Oplatek. Everyone at the table breaks off a piece and eats it as a symbol of their unity with Christ. There should be 12 meals- symbol of 12 apostles. Poppy seed cake, beet soup, prune dumplings, carp, herrings and noodles with poppy seed are universally Polish Christmas foods. Often there is compote of dry fruits. The remainder of the evening is given to stories and songs around the Christmas tree. It is decorated with nuts, apples and ornaments made from eggshells, coloured paper, straw, and hand blown glass baubles. In areas of the country, children are taught that "The Little Star" brings the gifts. As presents are wrapped, carolers may walk from house to house, receiving treats along the way. In Poland, an elaborate tradition called Wigilia is celebrated. Beginning on Christmas Eve, a strict 24-hour fast is observed which ends with a huge Christmas feast. In honour of the star of Bethlehem, the meal cannot begin until the first star of night appears. Though Christmas in Poland is officially known as Boże Narodzenie, it is most often referred to as Gwiazdka, which means, "Little star." Once the star appears, a special rice wafer blessed by the parish priest called oplatek, is broken into pieces and shared by all. Finally the meal can begin. The feast consists of twelve courses, one for each Apostle. The table is always set with one extra seat in case a stranger or the Holy Spirit should appear to share the meal.

## Slovakia

Christmas in Slovakia is largely a celebration of family, food, and religious observation. It is a Christian holiday which starts on December 24th and is followed by two more days of Christmas. Christmas is celebrated mainly on December 24th, or Christmas Eve - Štedrý deň (pron. "Shtiedree dien", means "open-handed day") when the gifts are given in the evening. However, the December 25 and 26 are also free days. According to tradition, gifts are brought by Ježiško (pron. "Yezheeshko"), or "baby Jesus". Parents usually put the gifts under the Christmas tree before dinner and kids are surprised when they find them there after dinner. They think, baby Jesus brought the presents while they had dinner. Dinner is usually soup (sauerkraut sup, lentil..) fried fish, potato salad, cookies, fruit... Different parts of Slovakia have different customs. It's popular here to build the monumental wooden Bethlehem in the glory of Jesus's birth.

## Eastern Europe

Since the 1880s, the Christmas customs of Eastern European Slavic countries have included a similar character known as [\*Ded Moroz\*](#) ("Grandfather Frost"). According to legend, he travels in a magical *troika* — a decorated sleigh drawn by three horses. With his young, blond assistant *Snegurochka* (the Snow Maiden, said to be his granddaughter) at his side, he visits homes and gives gifts to good children. He only delivers presents to children while they are asleep, and unlike Santa, he does not travel down chimneys, coming instead to the front door of children's homes. It is traditional for children to leave food for Ded Moroz just as American and British children do.

This Ded Moroz is not identified nor in any way associated with St. Nicholas of Myra, who is very widely revered in Eastern Europe more for his clerical and charitable works as a

Bishop. In all likelihood, Ded Moroz is actually a Slavic interpretation of the American Santa Claus or some similar figure, any connection to the original saint long since disappeared.

## Romania

*Further information:* [Christmas customs in Romania](#)

## Russia

In Eastern Europe, Slavic countries have the tradition of [Ded Moroz](#) ("Grandfather Frost"). He is accompanied by his granddaughter Snegurochka ("Snowmaiden"). According to legend, he travels in a magical troika, a decorated sleigh drawn by three horses, and delivers gifts to children. He is thought to descend more from Santa Claus than from [Saint Nicholas](#).

Christmas celebration in Russia is on the 7th of January (which corresponds to December 25 in the Julian Calendar). The tradition of celebrating Christmas has been revived since 1992, after decades of suppression by the communist government. It is centered on the Christmas Eve "Holy Supper", which consists of twelve servings, one to honor each of Jesus' apostles. The Russian traditions were largely kept alive by shifting some of them, including the visit by gift-giving "Grandfather Frost" and his "Snowmaiden", to New Year's Day. Many current Russian Christmas customs, including their Christmas tree, or "yolka", were brought by Peter the Great, after his western travels in the late 18th century.

## Northern Europe

In Germany and the Netherlands, the celebration of Saint Nicholas Day on December 6th resembles the Christmas of the English-speaking world. *Sinterklaas*, from whom the English and American Santa evolved, is based on the real [Saint Nicholas](#), and brings presents on the evening of December 6 to every child who has been good. He wears a red bishop's dress with a red mitre, rides a white horse over the rooftops, and is assisted by many mischievous helpers called 'zwarte Pieten' (black Peters). In some parts of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, the frightening Knecht Ruprecht also appears, to the chagrin of many children.

## German-speaking areas of Europe

The Striezelmarkt, Germany's oldest [Christmas Market](#), boasting the specialities of the Dresden region, is arguably a worldwide Christmas gift production center which continues for nearly one month. This is the time when Dresden [Stollen](#) fruitcake, Pulsnitzer [gingerbread](#), wood carvings from the Erzgebirge Mountains, Dresden Pflaumentoffel, Lusatian indigo print, Silesian ceramics, Bohemian glass, and Meissen porcelain dominate the lives of visitors who come from all over to thoroughly immerse themselves in Christmas.

Knecht Ruprecht ("Black Peter") is a companion of [Father Christmas](#) in many different German speaking areas of Europe.

In some German-speaking communities (particularly in southern Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Liechtenstein), the character of Santa is replaced by the [Christkind](#) (literally



"Christ child"). He or Father Christmas brings the presents not on the morning of December 25th, but on the evening of December 24th. A knock on the door heralds Father Christmas's arrival; someone dressed in a red suit and white beard enters with a sack and a stick, supposedly for punishing the children if they have been bad. He asks how well-behaved the children have been, and they have to say a poem or sing a song. For families who lack a suitable figure, or to confuse suspicious children, Father Christmases can be hired to come to homes and play the part. The Christkind, by contrast, is never seen. However, it rings a bell just before it leaves in order to let children know that the [Christmas tree](#) and the presents are ready.

It is a tradition to lavishly decorate a [Christmas tree](#) in the days preceding Christmas, and late Christmas Eve, for the tree to be unveiled and presents to be exchanged. In Protestant Christian churches, there is often a service in the late afternoon, intended to immediately precede this - this service often caters to families with children.

See [Saint Nicholas](#) for information about *Saint Nicholas Day*, a festivity similar to Christmas from which many English and American traditions derive.

## Germany

*Main article:* [German Christmas traditions](#)

In Germany, Christmas traditions vary by region. Following Saint Nicholas Day, (December 6) which is mostly for children, the actual Christmas gift-giving usually takes place on the night of Christmas eve, with gifts put under the Christmas tree after a simple meal. The culinary feast typically takes place at lunch on Dec. 25, and usually involves poultry (typically roast goose). The gifts may be brought by the *Weihnachtsmann*, who resembles St. Nicholas, or by the [Christkind](#), a sprite-like child who may or may not represent the baby Jesus. Commercially, the [Striezelmarkt](#) is arguably a worldwide Christmas gift production center, boasting the specialties of the Dresden region, from ceramics and prints to various delicacies which are shipped worldwide.

A Christmas tale in Germany is of the Krampus. The Krampus is a monster who punishes bad children on Christmas Eve, as "Saint Nicholas" delivers presents to the deserving. The Krampus is a monster that has an extra long tongue, and is seven feet tall. He carries a whip, and has a very active sexual drive. He also carries a wicker basket that he uses to carry bad children to his lair. There has not been a Krampus since the Pope cast him into purgatory. Families use the story of the Krampus to scare the children into being good.

In Austria today, people dressed as Krampuses will run down the streets and beat the "bad" out of those whom they see fit.

## The Netherlands and Belgium

*Sinterklaasavond* (St. Nicholas evening) remains more important in the Netherlands than Christmas, although in recent years, the Dutch have started to celebrate Christmas Eve with Santa as well. This sparks minor controversy each year over when it is "appropriate" to start celebrating Christmas, with shopkeepers preferring to start the lucrative Christmas season immediately after Sinterklaasavond (sometimes putting up decorations even earlier) while others argue that the "foreign" and "commercial" Christmas impinges too much on the

traditional Sinterklaas celebrations. Considering the ancestry of Santa Claus, it has truly been said that Sinterklaas is in competition with himself here.

The present-giver in children's folklore in The Netherlands and Belgium is a Santa-ish character called Sinterklaas or Sint Nicolaas. Like Father Christmas in Germany, Sinterklaas is often accompanied by a black helper named Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) who punishes disobedient children. Sinterklaas wears a tall bishop's hat and carries a crooked staff. He is said to reside in Spain, and in mid-November he arrives by steamboat, an event which is often acted out in the many coastal communities of the Low Countries. Dutch children leave their shoes out on many nights in the run-up to the actual celebration, to find them filled with small treats in the morning. December 5 (The Netherlands) and December 6 (Belgium) are traditionally recognized as the main gift-giving days of the Low Countries, with December 25 being a lower-key, more religious event.

In recent years Dutch and Belgian cultures have also incorporated Santa Claus into their traditions, with him and Sinterklaas being recognized as two distinct characters.

Walloons call Sint Nicolaas *Saint Nicolas* and Zwarte Piet *Père Fouettard* (Whipping Father).

Christians and a large amount of people having a christian background go to church with Christmas. The Roman-catholic service is on Christmas eve, the protestant churches in the Netherlands have their christmas service on 25 december. This service is normally kept somewhat simpler compared to normal services, with more attention to the children and the singing of famous old christmas hymns. Since the end of the 20th centuries, some protestant churches also have services on christmas eve. Due to the high amount of church abandoning during the last few centuries, a lot of old churches have been closed. However, the amount of people that want to visit a church service with christmas seems to be as large as several years ago. Therefore, the remaining churches become too small to accommodate all the attendants with christmas.

## Sweden

Swedish Christmas celebrations begin with the first of Advent. Saint Lucy Day (locally known as *Luciadagen*) is the first major Christmas celebration before Christmas itself. As in many other countries in northern Europe, [Santa Claus](#) brings the presents on [Christmas Eve](#), the day generally thought of as Christmas.

Christmas is as everywhere a holiday of food, almost all Swedish families celebrate Christmas on December 24 with a Christmas smörgåsbord (*julbord*). The common part of almost all julbord is the julskinka (baked ham), but there are also other common dishes such as meatballs, pickled herring, square ribs, lutfisk, pork sausage, Janssons frestelse (grated potatoes, onion, anchovy and cream), and [rice pudding](#). The Christmas julbord is served with beer or julmust (somewhat similar to root beer) and snaps, the dishes of the julbord may vary throughout Sweden. Businesses traditionally invite their employees to a julbord dinner or lunch the weeks before Christmas, and people go out privately to restaurants offering julbord during December, as well.

Examples of candies and treats associated with Christmas are toffee, knäck (quite similar to butterscotch), fruit, nuts, figs, chocolate, dates and [marzipan](#). Another Scandinavian

speciality is the [glögg](#) (mulled and spiced wine with almonds and raisins), which is served hot in small cups.

After the julbord on Christmas Eve, the presents are distributed, either by Father Christmas or from under the Christmas tree.

Television plays a big role in most families, the Disney Christmas special and Karl Bertil Jonssons julafton (animated short) are regarded by many to be the most important highlights of the Christmas television programming.

Christmas presents are exchanged on Christmas Eve by [Santa Claus](#), who usually does not bring the presents himself, but reads the labels of the presents that have been laying under the Christmas tree all day and hands them out. An alternative to this is just to hand out the presents without a Santa. In older days a [yule goat](#) was an alternative to Santa, nowadays it is used as an ornament, ranging from sizes of 10 cm to huge constructions like the Gävle goat, famous for being vandalized almost every Christmas.

If one has two families to celebrate Christmas with, it is common that one of the families move their celebrations to Christmas Day or the first Saturday before Christmas Eve (commonly referred to as *little Christmas Eve*).

After Christmas Eve, the Christmas celebrations have more or less come to an end. Some people attend the julottan, an early morning church service on [Christmas Day](#). [Christmas Day](#) and [Boxing Day](#) are of no big significance to Swedish celebrations.

On January 13 (locally known as *knutdagen*), 20 days after Christmas, the Christmas celebrations come to an end and all Christmas decorations are removed.

## Norway

The big day in Norway, as in most of Northern Europe, is December 24. Although it is legally a regular workday until 16:00, most stores close early. The main Christmas meal is served in the evening. Common main dishes include pork rib, "[pinnekjøtt](#)" (pieces of lamb rib steamed over birch branches), and in some western areas burned sheep's head. Many people also eat "[lutefisk](#)" or fresh, poached cod. Rice porridge is also popular (but most commonly served the day after rather than for the main Christmas dinner), an almond is often hidden in the porridge, and the person who finds it wins a treat or small gift. In many families, where the parents grew up with different traditions, two different main dishes are served to please everyone.

For a lot of Norwegians, especially families, television is an important part of the earlier hours of Christmas Eve. Many Norwegians do not feel the Christmas spirit until they have watched the Czech fairy tale TYi oYíšky pro Popelku (Norwegian title: Tre nøtter til Askepott) and the Disney Christmas cavalcade.

If children are present (and they have behaved well the last year), "Julenissen" (Santa Claus) pays a visit, otherwise gifts are stored under the Christmas tree and then distributed by the youngest present. Many people also attend church, even if they are not regular churchgoers.

December 25 is a very quiet and relaxed day, before the festivities take off on December 26. Cinemas, night clubs and bars are full, and there are lots of private gatherings and parties, where all kinds of traditional [Christmas cookies](#) and sweets are enjoyed. Fatty, tasty dinners are also part of it. The time between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve is called romjul. During

this time children in the western parts of Norway dress up with masks and go "Julebukk" - "Christmas bucks" - asking for treats, much the same way as in the American Halloween. January 13 (20th day of Christmas, called St. Knuts Day) is the official end of Christmas.

## Finland

Main article: [\*Joulupukki\*](#)

Joulupukki is the Finnish name for Santa Claus. The name Joulupukki literally means *Yule Goat* or *Christmas Goat*. This name is likely to come from an old Finnish tradition, where people dressed in goat hides called *nuuttipukkis* used to circulate in homes after Christmas eating leftover food.

Today Joulupukki looks and behaves mostly like his American version, but there are differences. Joulupukki's workshop is situated, not in the North Pole or Greenland, but in Korvatunturi, Lapland, Finland. He does not sneak in through the chimney during the night, but knocks on the front door during Christmas eve. When he comes in, his first words usually are: "*Onkos täällä kilttejä lapsia?*" (Are there (any) nice children here?)

He wears usually red, warm clothes and uses a walking stick. He goes to people's homes with a sleigh driven by a number of reindeer, of which one is called Petteri Punakuono (Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer). Joulupukki has a wife, Joulumuori (Christmas Lady), who knows how to make very delicious Christmas porridge, *riisipuuro* (rice porridge).

## Southern Europe

Modern traditions combine with holdovers from their Roman forebears in the celebrations of *Natale*, the Italian Christmas. The pagan feast of *Saturnalia* coincides with the Christian advent, and the holiday season there spans from these weeks through Epiphany. Food, religious observances, nativity displays, and gift-giving are prominent. In some regions, presents are brought on Epiphany by *La Befana*, and in others by Baby Jesus on Christmas day or eve. In recent years *Babbo Natale* (literally, *Father Christmas*), a Santa Claus-like figure, is becoming more common.

## Ireland

Christmas in Ireland is largely a religious observation with church services playing a major role in the celebration of Christmas. The Irish people display the Spirit of Christmas with generosity to the street vendors and the less fortunate around the time of Christ's birth. In the countryside, cottages are freshly white washed in preparation for the Holy Season. Christmas Day is largely reserved for family gatherings. Beginning on St. Stephen's Day, the 26th of December, through January 6th, "Christmas Week" is spent visiting and entertaining friends for food, a bit of drink and crack (fun).

## The UK

In the United Kingdom the traditions are quite similar to those of Australia, North America and New Zealand. On Christmas Eve, presents are delivered in stockings and under the Christmas tree by [Father Christmas](#), who previously had been something like the *ghost of Christmas present* in Charles Dickens' [Christmas Carol](#), but has now become mainly conflated with [Santa Claus](#). The two names are now used interchangeably and equally known to British people, but Father Christmas tends to be used more often, and some distinctive features still remain. On Christmas Day, many families and sometimes friends gather around for a traditional Christmas meal.

Goose or turkey is generally the centrepiece of the meal, followed by [Christmas pudding](#).

Television is widely watched: for many television stations, Christmas Day is the most important day of the year in terms of ratings. Many Britons still watch the Queen's annual [Christmas message](#).

The Celebration of [Boxing Day](#) on the first weekday after Christmas Day is a tradition practiced in the UK.

## Africa

### Nigeria

**Christmas Day**, not a day a public holiday, is celebrated mainly in the southern and eastern parts of Nigeria. Nigerians have special traditions they employ to celebrate Christmas. Almost everyone goes to church on [Christmas Day](#). Weeks before the day, people buy lots of hens, turkeys, goats and cows. Children hover around the beasts, taunting, and mostly gawking at them. There are feverish preparations for travel, holiday, and exchange of gifts, caroling and all manner of celebration.

On [Christmas Eve](#), traditional meals are prepared. In Yorùbáland, such meals usually include **Iyan**, (pounded yam) eba or amala, served with peppery stewed vegetables. People find themselves eating this same meal three to four times on that day, as they are offered it at every house they visit; and according to Yorùbá customs, it was considered rude to decline to eat when offered food. Other meals include rice served with chicken stew, which is a bit similar to the Indian curry stew. Some families would include a delicacy called **Moin-moin**; which is blended black eyed beans, mixed with vegetable oil and diced liver, prawns, chicken, fish and beef. The concoction is then wrapped in large leaves and then steamed until cooked.

Another tradition is that of decorating homes (compounds) and churches with both woven and unwoven palm fronds, Christmas trees and Christmas lights. There are the festive jublations on the streets, the loud crackling of fireworks and luminous starry fire crackers going off, traditional masquerades on stilts parading about and children milling about displaying their best clothes, or Christmas presents. There are no other celebrations that compare to Christmas festivities in Nigeria, where everyone can personalize their own festival, and one family's gusto merges with others; both physically and psychologically, creating a universe of fun and bonhomie.

## See also

- [American Christmas traditions](#)
- [Christmas customs in Poland](#)
- [Christmas customs in Romania](#)
- [Christmas customs in the Philippines](#)
- [German Christmas traditions](#)

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## Christmastime greetings

**Christmastime greetings** are a selection of greetings that are often spoken with good intentions to strangers, family, friends, or other people around the time of [Christmas](#).

Some greetings are more prevalent than others, depending on the cultural and religious status of any given area.

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- [1 History](#)
  - [1.1 Merry / Happy Christmas](#)
- [2 References](#)
- [3 See also](#)

### History

Though Christmas has been celebrated since the 4th century AD, the first known usage of any Christmastime greeting, "*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*" (thus incorporating two greetings) was in an informal letter written by an English admiral in 1699. The same phrase appeared in the first [Christmas card](#), produced in 19th century England.

The then relatively new term "*Merry Christmas*" figured prominently in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in 1843. The cynical Ebenezer Scrooge rudely deflects the friendly greeting and broods on the foolishness of those who utter it. "If I could work my will," says Scrooge, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding." After the Spirits of Christmas effect his transformation, he is able to heartily exchange the wish with all he meets. The continued popularity of *A Christmas Carol* and the Victorian era Christmas traditions it typifies have led some to credit Dickens with popularizing, or even originating, the phrase "Merry Christmas"<sup>[1]</sup>.

The alternative "Happy Christmas" gained wide usage in the late 19th century, and is still common in the United Kingdom and Ireland. One reason may be the alternative meaning, still current there, of "merry" as "tipsy" or "drunk." Queen Elizabeth II is said to prefer "Happy Christmas" for this reason<sup>[2]</sup>. In American poet Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (1823), the final line, originally written as "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night," has been changed in many editions to "Merry Christmas to all", perhaps indicating the relative popularity of the phrases in the United States.



## Merry / Happy Christmas

The origin of this greeting can be viewed in the [History section](#) above. It refers directly to the [Christmas](#) holiday and was initially the first greeting used for any holiday in the November–January timeframe (in unison with Happy New Year). This greeting is popular among Christians and the non-religious alike, though is not as popular with non-Christian religions. The greeting is frequently delivered when it is known that the receiver is a Christian or celebrates [Christmas](#), but was used to a much stronger degree in the past (note that Christian populations were higher in the past). The nonreligious often use the greeting, however would usually focus heavily on the secular aspects of Christmas, rather than the Nativity of Jesus.

Its meanings and variations are:

- As "Merry Christmas", the traditionally used greeting, comprising of merry (*jolly, happy*) and [Christmas](#) (Old English: *Cristes mæsse*, for *Christ's Mass*).
- As "Merry Xmas", usually used to avoid the length of "*Merry Christmas*", with the "X" (sometimes controversially) replacing "Christ". (see [Xmas](#))
- As "Happy Christmas", an alternative that is used in the United Kingdom and Ireland.
- As "Feliz Navidad", which is the Spanish language equivalent of "*Happy Christmas*", but is frequently used in English context.

As of 2005, this greeting still remains popular among countries with large Christian populations, including, among others, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and Mexico. It also remains popular in non-Christian areas such as the People's Republic of China and Japan, where Christmas is still widely celebrated due to Western influences. Though it has somewhat decreased in popularity in the United States and Canada over the past decades, polls from 2005 indicate that it is more popular than "[Happy Holidays](#)" or other generic alternatives<sup>[3][4]</sup>.

## References

1. <sup>^</sup> [Dickens' Christmas Sequels](#) (stm). LetsGo Online (1998). Retrieved on 2006-06-11.
2. <sup>^</sup> [Christmas Words and Phrases](#) (html). The Phrase Finder (2004). Retrieved on 2006-06-11.
3. <sup>^</sup>
4. <sup>^</sup> ["Merry Christmas" beats "Happy Holidays" In 2005 Usage](#) (html). BusinessKnowledgeSource.com (2005). Retrieved on 2006-06-12.

## See also

- [Christmas](#)
- [Christmas card](#)
- [Christmas Eve](#)

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## Festival of Trees

**Festival of Trees** is the name taken by a number of (apparently independent) charity events/organizations that hold annual events around [Christmas](#) time to raise money for some local charity (often, but not always, a hospital or more specifically, a children's hospital) These events seem to be becoming more common in North America as of this writing and are centered around the decoration and display of [Christmas trees](#).

The general outline of the event is as follows, although details may vary from location to location.

- Sponsors are obtained who agree to cover costs of advertising, hiring a hall or convention center, obtaining undecorated trees (or wreaths or other traditional holiday decorations) or the cost of a particular tree's decorations, producing a program, or covering other costs.
- Designers are engaged to decorate/design the trees. Often elaborate theming is employed. Sometimes clubs, schools or other organizations participate as well as professional designers.
- The hall is opened to the designers or organizations who decorate and arrange the trees.
- The hall is opened to the general public, often for an admission charge. The public may be able to bid or buy raffle tickets for the trees or other decorations, or for prizes also donated. (typically one of the event goals is to sell every tree that is on display)
- At some point there may be a black tie gala for contributors or supporters. Presentations about the charity supported are often made.
- The event usually gets a lot of local media attention before and during the public visitation period
- There may be other attractions such as children's play areas, craft areas, visits with santa and so forth
- The event winds down and the purchasers of the trees pick them up or make arrange for delivery

Depending on the size of the municipality where the Festival of Trees is held, there may be several hundred trees of all sizes on display, and the amounts raised can be in the hundreds of thousands USD.

Some Examples (not intended to be exhaustive, merely illustrative of the sort of event):

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## Garland



**Garland** is a decoration, used for [Christmas](#), or other holidays, seasons, or special events. Types of garland include:

- tinsel garland
- pine garland
- rope garland
- popcorn and/or cranberry garland
- bead garland
- vine garland

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## German Christmas traditions

**German Christmas traditions** have inspired [Christmas](#) celebrations around the world, particularly in the United States.

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- [1 Introduction](#)
- [2 Tannenbaum](#)
- [3 St. Nicholas](#)
- [4 Food and drink](#)
- [5 Three Magi](#)
- [7 See also](#)

### Introduction

German Christmas traditions include the customs, folklore, history, family practices, and religious and secular symbols associated with this holiday. The Christmas season in Germany starts at the beginning of Advent, which is four Sundays before Christmas Day. In fact, Advent wreaths are one of the many symbolic German Christmas traditions. These wreaths are decorated with four candles around the outer circle and with one large candle in the middle. The four outer candles symbolize the 4,000 years that the world had to wait for Christ's coming. One candle is lit the first Sunday of Advent with two being lit the second Sunday and so on. The large candle in the center is lit on Christmas Day.

### Tannenbaum

The Tannenbaum, or [Christmas tree](#), has its roots in pre-Christian Germany. Religious rites were held in the forests and trees were decorated with candles. Like the Druids, the oak was sacred to the ancient Germans, in particular to the god Odin, so it was often the oaks that were lit and not the pines. The use of evergreens can be traced back to the 8th century, which

is when St. Boniface engaged in the common practice of adopting local pagan customs to help Christianize the indigenous peoples. He substituted the fir tree (Tannenbaum) for the oak of Odin and then he dedicated it to Christ, making it the Christbaum.

The creation of the modern Christmas tree is often attributed to the founder of the Lutheran movement, Martin Luther (1483-1546). This is questionable but there are "Tannenbaum" songs that date back to the middle of the 16th century. By the 19th century the Christmas tree had become popular in Europe and America, having been introduced by German immigrants.

Candles, of course, were the original source of light on Christmas trees and although the Germans, Austrians, and Swiss are increasingly using electric lights on their trees, many a Christbaum is still lit with candles.

There is a Bavarian Christmas tree tradition that is known as the "Brides Tree." This is where 12 ornaments are hung upon a tree to help bring good fortune to a newly married couple. The 12 ornaments symbolize the following: angel (God's guidance), bird (joy), fish (Christ's blessing), flower basket (good wishes), fruit basket (generosity), heart (true love), house (protection), pine cone (fruitfulness), rabbit (hope), rose (affection), Santa (goodwill), and teapot (hospitality).

## **St. Nicholas**

The Christmas tree is not the only familiar Christmas symbol that comes from Germany. [Santa Claus](#) also had his origins there. When Germany was being Christianized in the early Middle Ages, St. Nicholas, a 4th century bishop of Asia Minor, became popular there. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of children and his feast day is December 6th. Gradually a custom grew up where on the eve of St. Nicholas' feast day children would place their shoes or boots out for St. Nicholas to fill with candy and fruit, with the bad children getting twigs. St. Nicholas carried with him a book of sins with which he determined whether the child warranted the goodies or the twigs. Historically, St. Nicholas rode a white horse and he traveled with a dark-faced companion. The most common one was called Knecht Ruprecht. After the Protestant Reformation in Germany, German authorities wanted to do away with the image of a Catholic saint distributing gifts, so the idea of Santa Claus was born. Also created were the white beard, red suit, and sleigh. St. Nicholas is known by several names in different parts of Germany. These include Klaasbuur, Rauklas, Bullerklaas, and Sunnercla. In the eastern part of Germany, he is Ash Man, Shaggy Goat, or Rider. The name Kris Kringle is a corruption of the German term Christkindl ("Christ Child"). Saint Nicholas is now known primarily in Germany as Weihnachtsmann or Father Christmas. He increasingly doesn't appear any longer on December 6th but on Christmas Eve instead.

## **Food and drink**

Food and drink play a major role in the German Christmas celebration. In cities throughout Germany there are Christkindlesmarkts. In these Christmas markets one can enjoy all types of delicious Christmas edibles and beverages. Christmas goodies, from Lebkuchen (gingerbread) to Weihnachts Stollen (fruit bread) are plentiful. And the aroma of Glühwein ("glow wine"), a hot mulled wine that is drunk by adults and older children alike,

fills the air. On Christmas Day many German families sit down and enjoy a plump roast goose for dinner.

## Three Magi

January 6th is the day the three Magi came to visit the Christ Child. This is a holiday in Germany and it marks the end of the month and a half long Christmas celebration.

## See also

- [American Christmas traditions](#)
- [Christmas worldwide](#)
- [Father Christmas](#)
- [Joulupukki](#)
- [Yule log](#)

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## Grand Illumination

A **Grand Illumination** is an outdoor ceremony involving the simultaneous activation of lights. The most common form of the ceremony is for turning on [Christmas lights](#).

One of the older of such community events began in the restored Virginia capital city of Williamsburg in 1935, and is held there each year on the Sunday of the first full weekend in December. (That is, if December begins on a Sunday, the event is held the following Sunday.) Williamsburg's Grand Illumination is derived from a colonial (and English) tradition of placing lighted candles in the windows of homes and public buildings to celebrate a special event. The winning of a war, and birthdays of the reigning monarchs (King and/or Queen), were examples of such national events. The American tradition of fireworks displays for Independence Day, the English tradition surrounding Bonfire Night, as well as other holidays and events, are of a similar nature. There were many candles set in darkened windows in New York after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

In recent times, in many cities much larger than Williamsburg, such as Richmond, Virginia, multiple skyscrapers and other buildings are decorated with long mostly-vertical strings of a common theme, and are activated simultaneously in "Grand Illumination" ceremonies. Some communities, such as Norfolk, Virginia and Asheville, North Carolina, have Grand Illumination parades. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, a similar event is called the "Grand Illumination On The River." In Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts on Martha's Vineyard, Grand Illumination is one of the most significant events each summer, immediately preceded by a Community Sing. In the United Kingdom, the "Grand Illumination" ceremony is generally referred to as "Turning On The Lights", and occurs in virtually all towns and cities throughout the country.

## Trivia

- In the 1989 comedy film *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, actor Chevy Chase plays a man who attempts to follow American family Christmas traditions with elaborate Christmas lights and decorations on the exterior of the family home. His comedic attempt at a "Grand Illumination" for a family reunion is one of the high points of the story. The film has become an annual holiday favorite in many families.

## See also

- [Christmas tree](#)
- [Holiday Trail of Lights](#)

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## Hanukkah bush

"**Hanukkah bush**" is a lighthearted name for a decorated tree, similar or identical to a [Christmas tree](#), placed in a Jewish home during the winter holiday season. It is used by assimilationist Jewish families in the United States; that is, families that try to fit into U.S. culture by adopting customs that they do not see as seriously conflicting with Judaism. A "Hanukkah bush" can simply be a Christmas tree by another name, or it can be one that has been Judaicized by the use of Judaic-themed ornaments.

As celebrated in the U.S., Hanukkah often syncretizes some of the less-religious Christmas customs. One of these is the Christmas tree. Not all Jews perceive Christmas trees in the same way. Anita Diamant says, "When [a Jew] looks at a Christmas tree, he or she may be seeing two thousand years of virulent persecution by Christians against Jews." <sup>[1]</sup> But many Americans do not see Christmas trees as being *closely* associated with the religious aspects of Christmas; for example, Christmas trees are commonly accepted in workplaces as pleasant, non-sectarian decorations for "the holiday season."

Holiday trees are frowned on by many rabbis<sup>[2]</sup>, but a few fairly liberal non-Orthodox find no problem with it. In answer to the question "Is it OK for a Jewish family to have a Christmas tree," Rabbi Ron Isaacs<sup>[3]</sup> writing in 2003 says:

Today it is clear to me that the tree has become a secular symbol of the American commercial Christmas holiday, and not of the birth of Jesus. So, whether or not to have one depends on the character and judgement of each individual family. There are certainly Jewish families that feel that they can have a tree in the house without subscribing to the Christian element of the holiday.

It is very common for Jewish children whose families do not have trees to envy Christian friends who do. Some families feel that it is important for children to understand and value the difference between Judaism and Christianity and refuse to have a "Christmas tree" in

their home. On the other hand, it is not unusual for a Jewish family simply to have a Christmas tree and call it by that name. The "Hanukkah bush" falls somewhere between these extremes.

A typical family dynamic is described by Edward Cohen<sup>[4]</sup>, in a memoir about Jewish life in 1950s Mississippi:

I recalled the year I had asked my mother for a Christmas tree. It had seemed like a fun and harmless thing.... My mother refused, at first patiently.... We had Hanukkah, a minor military holiday transformed by the combined pressure of thousands of Jewish children over the years into a substitute for Christmas.... But I wanted a tree.

Exasperated finally, she said it would have to be in my room with the door shut because she wouldn't have any Christmas tree in her window. It was characteristic of her that she didn't take the easier approach of some Jewish parents who, without rabbinical sanction, were buying small, squat Christmas trees and renaming them Hanukkah bushes. They would put a Star of David at the top and hang little figures of the Maccabee warriors and a few incongruous Santas for variety. To my mother that was nothing but an agronomical ruse.

The phrase "Hanukkah bush" is not used seriously. It is generally understood to be a thin verbal pretense, a shorthand reminder that "we have a decorated tree for the holiday season but we do not celebrate Christmas."

Peter W. Williams<sup>[5]</sup> writes:

Some Jews eager to approximate Gentile customs... and with tongue firmly in cheek—add a "Hanukkah bush," or Christmas-tree substitute, and even have visits from "Uncle Max, the Hanukkah man," a clear counterpart to a well-known Christmas figure.

It often has the flavor of a joking apology or excuse, particularly to other Jews, for having been caught celebrating a custom that is agreeable but not quite proper. Thus, we read in a novel<sup>[6]</sup>:

"Louis was so unorthodox I caught him buying a Christmas tree one night.... Louis tried to fob it off as a Hanukkah bush."

"Did you ream him out?"

"Of course. As we were carrying it home. I was merciless."

Susan Sussman's 1983 children's book<sup>[7]</sup>, *There's No Such Thing as a Chanukah Bush*, Sandy Goldstein, explores the difficulties felt, not only by Jewish families in a predominantly Christian society, but the sometimes sharper tensions between Jewish families that do and do not have holiday trees. In the story, a wise grandfather resolves the situation by taking Robin, the have-not child, to a Christmas party given by his union chapter—a party he helped to organize. Thus, the book draws a distinction between *sharing* the Christmas holiday (which it approves) and *observing* it (which it questions). Robin's concluding thought is that maybe her friend "needed a Chanukah bush" because she lacked "friends who shared with you." A television adaptation of the book won an Emmy award in 1998.

A December, 1974 New York Times ad<sup>[8]</sup> by Saks Fifth Avenue, presumably well-attuned to New York sensibilities, offers an array of holiday merchandise including a "happy bagel" ornament, "painted and preserved with shellac, ready to hang on a Christmas tree, Chanukah bush, or around your neck, 3.50."

In a 1981 contretemps over a Nativity scene in a South Dakota capitol, a side issue involved a Christmas tree which had been decorated with seventeen Stars of David. The stars had been made by students at the Pierre Indian school. Governor William J. Janklow said that the tree was not the "Hanukkah bush" he had jocularly talked of contributing. The stars were

redistributed among other Christmas trees in the display, to avoid giving offense to some Jews by implying that the state endorsed Hanukkah bushes.<sup>[9]</sup>

Obviously a Hanukkah bush would not bear decorations having explicit Christian associations (such as an ornament with a picture of the Magi). However, this is not a conspicuous omission because most U.S. traditional [Christmas tree ornaments](#), such as colored balls and tinsel, have no such associations.

A Hanukkah bush is not to be mistaken with an actual [Christmas tree](#) which Russian Jews frequently use when celebrating Novi God, the Russified version of [Christmas](#) which was nationalized by the Soviet regime, combined with the celebration of the New Year, and devoid of religious meaning. Russian Jews in America and Israel often use [Christmas trees](#) in celebration of Novi God complete with the Russian version of [Santa Claus](#) ("[Ded Moroz](#)"), yet the celebrations are not signs of assimilation as often thought, but a tradition reflecting the secular Russian Christmas holiday (with the actual Christian Orthodox Christmas celebrated by Russian Christians in the beginning of January).

## Notes

1. [Choosing a Jewish Life: A Handbook for People Converting to Judaism](#); Anita Diamant; 1998, Schocken, ISBN 0-8052-1095-4
2. ["Rabbis are emphatic and virtually unanimous in their feeling that there is no place for Christmas celebrations within a Jewish home."](#) Anita Diamant, op. cit. But that would seem to be overstating the case, vide Isaacs (2003).
3. [Ask the Rabbi: The Who, What, When, Where, Why, & How of Being Jewish](#); Ron Isaacs; 2003; Jossey-Bass; ISBN 0-7879-6784-X
4. [The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi](#); Edward Cohen; 2002; Delta; ISBN 0-385-33591-1
5. [America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century](#); Peter W. Williams; 2001; University of Illinois Press; ISBN 0-252-06682-0
6. [Mallory's Oracle](#), Carol O'Connell, 1995, Jove, ISBN 0-515-11647-5
7. [There's No Such Thing as a Chanukah Bush](#), Sandy Goldstein; Susan Sussman; illus. Charles Robinson; 1983; Albert Whitman & Company; ISBN 0-8075-7862-2; 48 pp, reading level age 4-8
8. [The New York Times](#), December 6, 1974, p. 23
9. ["Nativity Scene in Capitol Stirs South Dakota Rights Protest,"](#) The New York Times December 1, 1981, p. A17

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## Holiday Trail of Lights

The **Holiday Trail of Lights** is a group of cities in Northwest Louisiana and Northeast Texas. Six Arklatexan cities participate in the Trail, three in Louisiana (Natchitoches

(pronounced Nack-a-tish), Shreveport and Bossier City) and three in East Texas (Marshall, Jefferson and Kilgore).

The *Wonderland of Lights* in Marshall is one of the largest Christmas celebrations in the US and attracts tourists both from the US and other countries. The *Festival of Lights and Christmas Festival* in Natchitoches was started in 1927, making it one of the oldest Light Festivals in the US. The largest city, Shreveport's festival, Holiday in Dixie, lights up a botanical garden, the American Rose Center. Candle light tours of historic homes are popular attractions in all of the cities, especially Jefferson. Kilgore suspends Christmas lights from oil derricks in the World's Richest Acre District.

All of the cities are within a one hour drive of each other and hold parades during the festival and offer what the official website calls "Southern hospitality".

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## Hollywood Christmas Parade

The **Hollywood Christmas Parade** is a parade that takes place every year on the weekend after thanksgiving in Hollywood, California, in the United States. The parade's 3.2 mile route travels along Hollywood Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard and highlights many celebrities in its participants.

### History

The Hollywood Christmas Parade began in 1928 when the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce came up with the idea in order to boost shopping. It was originally called the **Santa Claus Lane Parade** and featured only [Santa Claus](#) and the actress Jeanette Loff.

The parade continued to grow with the help of local business and community and in 1931 Santa Claus rode a truck pulled float instead of the reindeer-pulled carriage of previous years. American Legion Post 43 marched with a color guard, drum line and bugle corps.

The Parade was suspended from 1942 to 1944 due to World War II, but the parade reopened in 1945 with record attendance.

In 1946 Gene Autry took rode his horse along with the parade and was inspired by the children yelling "Here comes Santa Claus, Here comes Santa Claus," to write the song "Here Comes Santa Claus" along with Oaklely Haldeman.

The parade continued to grow through 1950s, '60s, and '70s, adding floats, animals, bands, and celebrities.

In 1978 the parade was renamed to the Hollywood Christmas Parade to attract more celebrities and the parade was broadcast locally on KTLA with the help of Johnny Grant.

### Grand Marshals

- 1932 - Joe E. Brown  
1998 - Robert Urich  
1999 - Beau Bridges



2000 - Frankie Muniz, Dennis Hopper  
2001 - Peter Fonda  
2002 - Mickey Rooney  
2003 - Johnny Grant  
2004 - Magic Johnson  
2005 - Antonio Villaraigosa

## Sources

- Hollywood Christmas Parade (seeing-stars)
- Hollywood Christmas Parade (Chamber of Commerce)

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## Koleda

**Kolyada** or **koleda** is the original Slavic word for [Christmas](#). It was borrowed by Slavs from the Latin *calendae* [1]; compare "Kalends". In modern Ukrainian and Russian the word's meaning has shifted from Christmas itself to denoting the tradition of strolling, singing, and having fun on [Christmas Eve](#).

The word specifically applies to children and teens who walk house to house giving out congratulations, singing and sifting grain that denotes the best wishes and receiving candy and small money in return. The action received the name **kolyadovanie** and is now applied to similar Old East Slavic celebrations of other old significant holidays, such as *Generous Eve* (Ukrainian: )54@89 25Gi@) the evening before [Epiphany](#), as well as the celebration of the arrival of spring. In Bulgaria, a similar tradition of **koleduvane** (:>;54C20=5) is observed around Christmas, with groups of boys visiting each house and singing carols, and being offered a gift at parting. The boys are referred to as 'koledari' or rarely 'kolezhdani'.

Croatian composer Jakov Gotovac wrote in 1925 the composition "Koleda", which he called a folk rite in five parts, for male choir and small orchestra (3 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, Timpani and Drum).

## See also

- [Christmas carol](#)

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## Koledari

**Koledari** (Bulgarian: :>;540@8; from common Slavic *Koleda*, "[Christmas](#)") is the Bulgarian term for [Christmas carolers](#). In Bulgaria, carolers (called *koledari* or *survakari*) traditionally



start their rounds at midnight on [Christmas Eve](#). They visit the houses of their relatives, neighbours and other people in the village. Koledari are usually boys. Each caroler carries a cornel stick called *survachka* or *surovachka*, with which each one of them pats the backs of their parents, grandparents, and friends, thereby wishing them health, wealth and happiness.

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## Kucios

**Kk ios** is the traditional [Christmas Eve](#) supper in Lithuania, held on December 24. On the evening there is [Twelve-dish Christmas Eve supper](#) served.

Before eating family shares [Plotkelis](#). One of the parents or grandparents divide it to each member of the family with a wish.

Researchers believe, that this traditional festival had preserved many relicts of pagan beliefs and rituals. That's because after eating people try to predict the future with magical rituals. It is also believed, that that night people can understand what cattles and other animals are talking. People also believe that exactly on midnight water turns into wine which is reference to a miracle done by Jesus.

Lithuanian traditions are somewhat similar to [Wigilia](#) in Poland.

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## Christmas lights

**Christmas lights** (also sometimes called **fairy lights**, **twinkle lights** or **holiday lights** in the United States) are strands of electric lights used to decorate homes, public/commercial buildings and [Christmas trees](#) during the [Christmas season](#), mostly in the West. Christmas lights come in a dazzling array of configurations and colors.

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## History

The first known electrically-illuminated Christmas tree was the creation of Edward H. Johnson, an associate of inventor Thomas Edison. While he was vice president of the Edison Electric Light Company, a predecessor of today's Con Edison electric utility, he had Christmas tree light bulbs especially made for him. He proudly displayed his Christmas tree, which was hand-wired with 80 red, white and blue electric incandescent light bulbs the size of walnuts, on December 22, 1882 at his home on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Local newspapers ignored the story, seeing it as a publicity stunt. However, it was published by a Detroit newspaper reporter, and Johnson became the Father of Electric Christmas Tree Lights. By 1900, businesses started stringing up Christmas lights behind their windows.<sup>[1]</sup> Christmas lights were too expensive for the average person. Electric Christmas lights did not become the majority replacing candles until 1930.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1895, U.S. President Grover Cleveland proudly sponsored the first electrically lit Christmas tree in the White House. It was a huge specimen, featuring more than a hundred multicolored lights. The first commercially produced Christmas tree lamps were manufactured in strings of multiples of eight sockets by the General Electric Co. of Harrison, New Jersey. Each socket took a miniature two-candela carbon-filament lamp.

From that point on, electrically illuminated Christmas trees, but only in doors, grew with mounting enthusiasm in the United States and elsewhere. San Diego in 1904 and New York City in 1912 were the first recorded instances of the use of Christmas lights outside.<sup>[3]</sup> McAdenville North Carolina claims to have been the first in 1956.<sup>[4]</sup> The library of congress credits the town for inventing "the tradition of decorating evergreen trees with Christmas lights dates back to 1956 when the McAdenville Men's Club conceived of the idea of decorating a few trees around the McAdenville Community Center."<sup>[5]</sup> However, the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree has had "lights" since 1931, but did not have real electric lights until 1956.<sup>[6]</sup> Furthermore, Philadelphia's Christmas Light Show and Disney's Christmas Tree also began in 1956.<sup>[7][8]</sup> Though General Electric sponsored community lighting competitions during the 1920s, it would take until the mid 1950s for the use of such lights to be adopted by average households.

Over a period of time, strings of Christmas lights found their way into use in places other than just Christmas trees. Soon, strings of lights adorned mantles and doorways inside homes, and ran along the rafters, roof lines, and porch railings of homes and businesses. In recent times, many city skyscrapers are decorated with long mostly-vertical strings of a common theme, and are activated simultaneously in [Grand Illumination](#) ceremonies.

## Types

In modern times, Christmas lighting devices can be based on different technologies. Common technologies are incandescent light bulbs and now LEDs. Light bulbs or LEDs are usually connected in series to be powered from mains without a transformer (LED-based strings, of course, have a current-limiting resistor). Neon lamp based strings have lamps

connected in parallel, each with its own current-limiting resistor. All battery-powered lights are wired in parallel.

Other set-ups include light bulb or LED-based strings with a line isolation step down transformer with bulbs or LEDs connected in parallel (LEDs have current limiting resistors). These sets are much safer, but there is a voltage drop at the end of the string (less noticeable with LED than incandescent). There is also the "wall wart" transformer which may be difficult to plug in certain places.

There are even Christmas light sets that use fiber optic technology. They are usually incorporated into an artificial [Christmas tree](#). They have light bulbs or LEDs in the tree base and many fiber optic wires going to the leaves of the tree. These devices always have line isolation step-down transformer, because they have only one or two bulbs or LEDs.

Christmas lights can be animated. This is done by using special flasher or "interrupter bulbs" or electronically. An electronic Christmas light controller usually has a diode bridge followed by a resistor-based voltage divider, a filter capacitor and a fixed-program microcontroller. The animation modes are changed by pressing a button. The microcontroller has three or four outputs which are connected to transistors or thyristors. They control interleaved strings: commonly red, green, blue and yellow, or other combinations such as red, green and white.

Fiber-optic Christmas trees can also be animated electronically, but more often this is done by means of a rotating color filter disc when an incandescent light is used. Since 2005, electronic animation is used with LED-base fiber optics.

LED lights have the advantages of using 80-90% less electricity than incandescent bulbs, longer lifespan (some manufacturers claim 10 or 20 years), and color retention.

The light emitted by incandescent bulbs is all the same color at the early stage of production. Then, the bulb cover (envelope) is painted or dyed to achieve the colors we all enjoy.

LEDs on the other hand (except for the white hues, which use phosphors) emit a specific color, even if there is no envelope in place. Interestingly, it is also impossible to determine with the naked eye the color output of a non-energized LED.

Colored LED light strings use colored envelopes so that the consumer can identify which colors are on any given set of lights. Realistically, a multi-colored LED set could have all clear, colorless envelopes yet emit a full rainbow of colors once plugged in. Obviously, it would be hard to sell a set of colored bulbs to customers if the bulbs were colorless in the package, so manufacturers color the envelopes.

Even if a set of colored LED lights was exposed to the sun for years, and the colors of the envelopes were noticeably faded, the LEDs would maintain their original like-new colors. This would eliminate the current problem of having to replace light strings often after using them for only one Christmas season due to the faded envelopes (this is a particular problem with red lights, the envelopes of which will often fade to pink quite quickly).

## Sizes

*Note that the following may be particular to North America, and may vary in countries with mains other than 120 volts.*

Christmas lighting began with small C6 bulbs -- C meaning "candle" for the flame shape, and 6 meaning 6D8ths of an inch ( $3D_4$  inch, or 19mm) in diameter. These were on a candelabra screw-base, now designated E11 (Edison screw, 11mm). These bulbs are now produced as miniature strings, usually with the entire bulb replaced, but sometimes as a decorative cover with regular bulbs inside. These bulbs tend to be transparent white or colors, and are often ornately designed with crystal-like patterns.

Later bulbs were called C7½, being 7½/8ths inch ( $^{15}D_{16}$ ths, or 24mm) in diameter, however these have a blunt shape (and should therefore be called B7½, or B24). Mixing metric and English units, there are also now G30 globes which are 30mm ( $1+3D_{16}$  inch, or  $G9\frac{1}{2}$ ) in diameter that uses these sockets. These are still used for the classic or even retro look, and use about five watts each. Early bulbs, as well as some new antique reproductions, are made in various shapes and then painted like [Christmas ornaments](#). [Bubble lights](#) and twinkle bulbs also come in this size.

Outdoor-only bulbs are designated C9¼ ( $1+D_{32}$  inch or 29mm), and have a similar blunt shape as the C7½, but an E17 "intermediate" base. These are about seven watts each, and also now come in a globe shape, designated G40 (40mm or  $1+D_{16}$ ). Some of the blunt-shape bulbs now come painted with designs, or swirled in more than one color. It is now very difficult to find twinkle bulbs in this size.

Standard mini bulbs are T1¾, indicating that they are a tube shape  $^{7}D_{32}$  inch or 5.5mm in diameter. Larger mini bulbs, which began appearing around 2004, are about twice this size, but are still very uncommon. Both types, along with most of the candle-shaped ones, are pinched-off at the tip rather than the base during manufacturing.

Other miniature types include globe-shaped "pearl" and smaller "button" lights, which are often painted in translucent or pearlescent colors. "Rice" lights are tiny, like a grain of rice, and can even have a subminiature base, if they are not already fixed permanently to the wires (on low-voltage sets). These are typically transparent, intended to create tiny points of lights.

LED lights, which are encased in solid plastic rather than a hollow glass bulb, may be molded into any shape. Because of the way the LED casts light in only one direction, this is the most common way to design LED lighting, with even "plain" sets having some sort of crystal pattern to create refraction.

Many bargain brands have dome-shaped LEDs which focuses the light to where it's sharply visible when viewed head-on, but almost invisible from a perpendicular viewpoint. This has both advantages and disadvantages according to your decorating needs.

If a small LED bulb size but wider viewing perspective is desired, there are wide-angle LEDs available. Rather than being dome-shaped (convex), the envelope is concave (sunken in) to cause wider distribution of light.

All mini bulbs (including LED) have a wedge base, though the exact design of each is inconsistent, making it difficult to change bulbs. To replace a bulb, the plastic base of the bulb must usually be changed by straightening the two wires and pulling the glass part out. Most replacement bulbs do not even include the bases anymore, despite getting only ten in a package and being charged nearly half what an entirely new string of 100 costs. For this reason, many Americans treat mini Christmas lights as being disposable, in addition to colored lights tending to fade even with only brief exposure to weathering.

## Sets

Large bulbs typically come in sets of 25, though [bubble lights](#) strangely come in sets of seven, and some non-holiday sets come in ten or twelve. Sockets are usually spaced about one foot or 30cm apart, and are clamped to the wire with an integrated insulation-piercing connector.

Miniatures typically first came in sets of 35 (3.5 volts per bulb), and sometimes smaller sets of 20 (6 volts per bulb). Sets of ten (12 volts per bulbs) were made for very small trees, but are quite hot, and are now usually used for [tree toppers](#) only. This number is convenient for stars, which have a total of ten points (five outward and five inward), and often have another light in the middle, occasionally on both sides.

Incandescent minis now usually come in sets of 50 or 100 (which contains two circuits of 50), though decorative sets with larger bulbs (C6 or pearl) typically come in 35 or 70. Several "extra-bright" sets also use 70 or 105, keeping the per-bulb voltage at 3.5 instead of 2.5. Computerized sets usually come in 140 (35×4), or occasionally 150 (50×3) or 200 (50×4), rarely in 105 (35×3).

LED sets can vary greatly. Common is a set of 60 (2 volts per bulb), but white LED sets use two circuits of 30 (4 volts per bulb). Multicolor sets may have special wiring, because red and yellow require less voltage than the newer blue-based ones (which also includes both emerald green and fluorescent white).

Battery-powered sets typically come in 10 or 12, and can use standard 2.5 to 3.5-volt bulbs because they run two batteries, totaling three volts or less. LEDs are becoming increasingly common as they greatly prolong battery life, but because they also last longer they are often soldered right to the wires, making up for some of the increased cost of the newer LEDs. 'Rice lights' are often made this way as well, and likewise may also have more bulbs per set as they draw somewhat less power per bulb than other incandescents.

## Ornamentation

Early bulbs were sometimes made in shapes and painted, the same way that glass ornaments are. These are typically pressed glass, much as common dishware was at the time. These are reproduced in very limited quantity nowadays, typically found only at specialty retailers and online. Metal reflectors were also used until the 1970s, having a center hub of cardboard, which then had tabs that pressed between the bulb and the socket.

Miniature lights sets can come with attached ornaments, typically plastic but sometimes glass. These began mid-century with petal "reflectors" which actually refracted the light and focused it in beams, and perhaps even earlier with crystal-like ones. On both types, the bulb stuck out of the center, and the "reflector" could be removed from the socket. Later designs, though much less popular, included stars. LED lights now come molded into shapes, though the light comes from the top instead of the center.

Mini lights can also have full-size ornaments normally sold on sets of ten. Certain sets have more than one bulb per ornament, such as for snowmen and candy canes which are long. There is an enormous array of other designs, ranging from holly berries and poinsettias to star-shaped santas and wire mesh snowflakes. There are also ones for other holidays.

## **Safety**

In the past, Christmas light sets used line-voltage (120 or 240 volts depending on what country) light bulbs, similar to those used in refrigerators, connected in parallel. These sets were very power hungry and are used less widely nowadays. Even before that, Christmas trees were illuminated by candles.

The number of strands of continuous light sets that may be safely conjoined varies based on whether the lights are LEDs, ordinary miniature light bulbs, or the larger C7/C9 type light bulbs. Other factors include the voltage of the set and the size of the wiring in the set. If you have questions, consult the manufacturer's instructions or an electrician.

Most light sets come with built in fuses to help protect against overheating and to prevent your house's fuses or circuit breakers from being tripped. If you blow a fuse, unplug the strand from the power source and reduce the number of lights immediately. If the strand has nothing attached, or has blown repeatedly, the strand may contain a short and should be discarded.

It should also be noted that many light sets may contain traces of lead, and consumers should wash hands thoroughly after handling these products, especially before eating. Proposition 65 of California requires that if products contain lead or traces of lead then a warning must be printed on packing of products. Be sure to check the label for this and any additional warnings.

## Outdoor displays

In the U.S. from the 1960s, beginning in tract housing, it became increasingly the custom to completely outline the house (but particularly the eaves) with weatherproof Christmas lights. The [Holiday Trail of Lights](#) is a joint effort by cities in east Texas and northwest Louisiana that had its origins in the Festival of Lights and Christmas Festival in Natchitoches, started in 1927, making it one of the oldest light festivals in the United States.

It is often a pastime to drive around neighborhoods in the evening to see the lights displayed on and around other homes. While some homes have no lights, others may have incredibly ornate displays which require weeks to construct. A rare few have even made it to the Extreme Christmas TV specials shown on HGTV, at least one requiring a generator and another requiring separate electrical service to supply the amount of electrical power required.

A holiday tradition that started in Richmond, Virginia is a "Tacky Light Tour," begun in 1986 by Barry "Mad Dog" Gottlieb as the "Tacky Xmas Decoration Contest and Grand Highly Illuminated House Tour". People either sign up for a tour, or drive themselves around to find houses that are the tackiest. Most of the houses on this tour are completely covered in Christmas lights, similar to the way Clark Griswold decorated his house in the movie Christmas Vacation. Many people in Richmond, and other cities as well, strive to have the tackiest house in the city.

## Light sculptures

Lights are sometimes mounted on frames -- typically metal for large lights and plastic for miniature ones. These started on lampposts, street lights, and telephone poles in cities and towns with large C7 bulbs, but by the 1990s were being made in smaller form with miniature lights for home use. Public displays often have outdoor-rated [garland](#) on the frame as well, making them very decorative even in the daytime. Annual displays in Oxford Street, London, England are adored by the public and local businesses alike, have been erected for decades and will continue to do so with the help of companies like Piggotts [\[1\]](#). Consumer types now tend to come with a plastic sheet backing printed in the proper design, and in the 2000s now with nearly photographic quality graphics and usually on a holographic "laser" backing.

Light sculptures are still the main form of public displays such as in Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge in Tennessee.

## Other holidays

In the United States, "Christmas" lights have been produced for many other holidays. These may be simple sets in typical holiday colors, or the type with plastic ornaments which the light socket fits into. Light sculptures are also produced in typical holiday icons.

Halloween is the most popular, with miniature light strings having black-insulated wires and semi-opaque orange bulbs. Later sets had some transparent purple bulbs (a representation of black, similar to blacklight), a few even have transparent green, or a



translucent or semi-opaque lime green (possibly representing slime as in Ghostbusters, or creatures like goblins or space aliens).

[Easter](#) lights are often produced in pastels. These typically have white wire and connectors.

Red, white, and blue lights are produced for Independence Day, as well as U.S. flag and other patriotic-themed ornaments. Net lights have been produced with the lights in a U.S. flag pattern. In 2006 some stores carried stakes with LEDs that light fiber-optics, looking similar to fireworks.

Various types of patio lighting with no holiday theme are also made for summertime. These are often clear white lights, but most are ornament sets, such as lanterns made of metal or bamboo, or plastic ornaments in the shape of barbecue condiments, flamingos and palm trees, or even various beers. Some are made of decorative wire or mesh, in abstract shapes such as dragonflies, often with glass "gems" or marbles. Light sculptures are also made in everything from wire-mesh frogs to artificial palm trees outlined in rope lights.

## Trivia

- Christmas light strings wired in series were often of a type where if one bulb burned out or was loose, an entire string would not illuminate. Development of wiring in parallel and shunts (antifuses) in individual bulb bases allowed bulbs to burn out without affecting the others.
- In the 1989 film *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, the character played by Chevy Chase attempts to follow American family Christmas traditions with elaborate Christmas lights and decorations on the exterior of the family home. He then attempts a "[Grand Illumination](#)" outside the house.
- In the 2006 film *Deck the Halls*, the character played by Danny DeVito tries to cover his house with enough Christmas lights for it to be visible from space.
- The Oklahoma alternative rock band Flaming Lips became known in their early days for covering their instruments in Christmas lights.

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## Christmas Market

In many towns in Germany and in Austria, Advent is usually ushered in with the opening of the town's **Christmas Market** or **Weihnachtsmarkt**, often also called **Christkindlmarkt** or **Christkindelsmarkt** (Ger. literally, *Christ child market*). Generally held in the town square and pedestrian zones, the market combines food and drink in the open air, shopping and pageantry as well as tradition. On opening night and, in some towns, every night, onlookers welcome the [Christkind](#), or Christ child, in the form of a golden-haired angel played by a local youth.

Some of the most popular items at the Market are the [Nativity Scene](#) (also known as a crèche or crib); *Zwetschgamännla* (figures made of decorated dried plums); *Nussknacker*



(carved [Nutcrackers](#)); *Gebrannte Mandeln* or candied, toasted almonds; assorted cookies like [Lebkuchen](#) and *Magenbrot* (both forms of soft [gingerbread](#)); *Christstollen* or [Stollen](#), a sort of egg bread with candied fruit; and not least, *Glühwein*, hot [mulled wine](#) (with or without a shot of brandy) to keep the body going in the cold winter air. Many other homemade crafts and toys, books, and (in recent years) more or less useful gadgets can be found at a Christkindlmarkt.

The most famous Christmas markets are held in the cities of Nuremberg, Dresden, and Stuttgart, making them very popular tourist stops. The Nuremberg and Dresden markets draw each year about two million, the Stuttgart market attracts more than three million visitors. Other well known markets are held in Cologne, Bonn, Lübeck and Vienna, Salzburg and Villach.

German immigrants to America brought the Christmas celebrations with them, and there are some Christkindlmarkt events held in the United States as well. Two examples are the Chicago Christkindl Market and the Denver Christkindl Market.

A large Christmas market is held in Birmingham, England, with visiting traders from its twin city of Frankfurt. The market claims to be the biggest German Christmas market outside Germany and Austria with over 75 stalls in 2006.

A large directory of [Christmas Markets](#) (a UK first) has been launched at [christmasmarkets.com](http://christmasmarkets.com)

## See also

- [Striezelmarkt](#)

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## National Christmas Tree

The **National Christmas Tree** is a 40-foot (12 m) Colorado blue spruce from York, Pennsylvania, planted on the Ellipse in Washington, D.C. on October 20, 1978. The lighting of the tree by the President of the United States is the central event in the annual **Christmas Pageant of Peace**. There is also an official "White House Christmas Tree", which is usually a cut tree placed within the White House.

The tradition of the outdoor decorated tree began in November 1923 when First Lady Grace Coolidge gave permission for the District of Columbia Public Schools to erect a cut [Christmas tree](#) on the Ellipse south of the White House. The first tree was a 48-foot balsam fir from Vermont, lit by President Calvin Coolidge at 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve. The organizers named the tree the "National Christmas Tree". The following year the name was changed to the "National Community Christmas Tree", and the name was not changed back until 1972. In more recent decades the tree was lit in mid-December rather than Christmas Eve. Today the tree is lit in early December.

From 1924 to 1953 live trees, in various locations around and on the White House grounds, were lit on Christmas Eve. In 1954 the ceremony returned to the Ellipse and

expanded its focus. Local civic and business groups created the "Christmas Pageant of Peace". Smaller live trees representing the 50 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia, formed a "Pathway of Peace". On December 17, 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower lit a cut tree donated by the people of Michigan. Cut trees continued to be used until 1973 when a live tree was planted. In 1977 the original tree needed to be replaced, but that tree only lasted one season, having been damaged in a windstorm. The current tree was 30 feet (9 m) when it was transplanted in 1978. The tree stands as a daily reminder of the holiday spirit and of the tradition each succeeding President has participated in since 1923.

President Jimmy Carter only lit the crowning star atop the Tree in 1979 in honor of the Americans being held hostage in Iran; in 1980, the tree was only fully lit for 417 seconds, one second for each day the hostages had been in captivity.

### See also

- [Rich's Great Tree](#)
- [Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree](#)

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## Nativity scene

A **nativity scene**, also called a **crib** or **crèche** (meaning "crib" or "manger" in French) generally refers to any depiction of the birth or birthplace of Jesus. In Spain and some hispanic countries, this is called **Belén** (meaning **Bethlehem** in Spanish). In Argentina it is called **pesebre**, similar to Catalan (pessebre), and in Mexico is known as **nacimiento** (in fact, 'pesebre', 'nacimiento' and 'Belén' can be used interchangeably in most Spanish speaking countries).

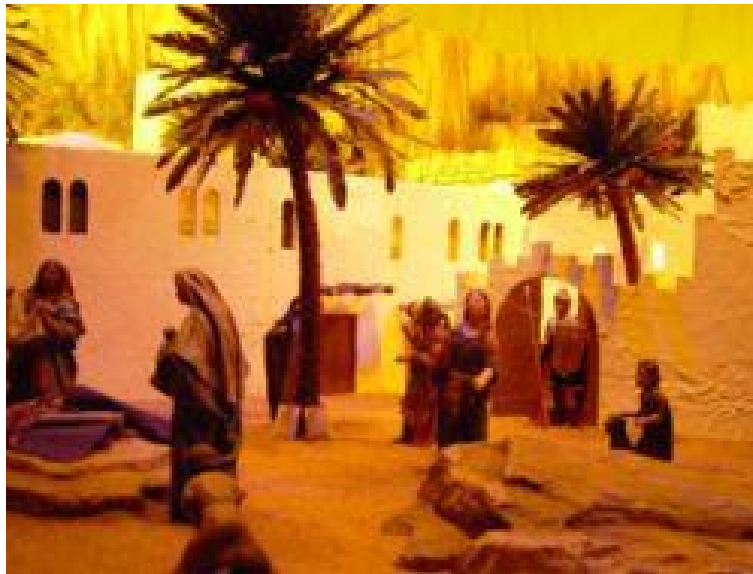
Christian **Nativity** scenes, in two dimensions (drawings, paintings, icons, etc.) or three (sculpture or other three-dimensional crafts), usually show Jesus in a manger, Joseph and Mary in a barn (or cave) intended to accommodate farm animals. A donkey and an ox accompany them; besides the necessity of animals for a manger, this is an allusion to Isaiah: "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Is. 1:3). The **scene** sometimes includes the Magi or Three Wise Men, shepherds, angels and the Star of Bethlehem. The traditional scenes that show the shepherds and Magi together are of course not true to the Bible story, since the Magi arrived much later (Luke 2:7-16).

At [Christmas](#) time these arrangements are created and displayed in Catholic (and some Protestant) homes, churches and parks.

For the Christmas season, two **Nativity** Scenes are put on display at the Vatican. The first is put inside the Vatican Basilica. The second, placed in the Piazza San Pietro before the [Christmas Tree](#), was made by Saint Vincent Pallotti.

Although St Francis of Assisi is credited with the invention of three-dimensional **Nativity Scenes**, drawings and paintings existed earlier. The tradition was brought into Spain from Naples during the reign of Charles III of Spain.

In Provence, in the South of France, **nativity** scenes are sometimes composed of hundreds of small painted clay figurines, called [santons](#), representing all the traditional trades and professions of old Provence. Because of their cultural value the *santons* are often collected as art or craft objects, regardless of their possible use in a **nativity scene**.



Detail from a monumental **nativity scene** in Parets del Vallès, Spain

In Mexico and in certain parts of Central America, it is traditional to build the **Nativity Scene** on December 16, the day of the first Posada. Traditionally, the Three Wise Men are not included in the **Nativity Scene** until January 6, Three King's Day. The **Nativity Scene** is not taken until February 2, Candlemas, which marks the end of the Epiphany season.

In some places in Spain, such as Parets del Vallès, monumental indoor **nativity** scenes are built. They can be as big as 280 m<sup>2</sup>, using more than 12,000 Kg of sand, 3,000 Kg of stones, 1,500 Kg of cork, and more than 800 figures. Light effects, water streams, rain, music, and atomatons are used to give a realistic touch to the **scene**.

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## Nutcracker

A **nutcracker** consists of a mechanical device for cracking nuts. It works on the principle of moments as described in Archimedes' analysis of the lever.

## Decorative

Nutcrackers in the form of wooden carvings of a soldier, knight, king, or other profession have existed since at least the 15th century. These nutcrackers portray a person with a large mouth which the operator opens by lifting a lever in the back of the figurine. Originally one could insert a nut in the big-toothed mouth, press down and thereby crack the nut. Modern nutcrackers in this style serve mostly for decoration, mainly at [Christmastime](#).

The carving of nutcrackers — as well as of religious figures and of cribs — developed as a cottage industry in forested rural areas of Germany. The most famous nutcracker carvings come from Sonneberg in Thuringia (also a center of dollmaking) and from the Ore Mountains. Wood-carving usually provided the only income for the people living there. Today the travel industry supplements their income by bringing visitors to the remote areas.

Nutcrackers have become popular in the United States as well, and a recreated "Bavarian village" of Leavenworth, Washington even features a Nutcracker Museum. Many other materials also serve to make decorated nutcrackers, such as porcelain, silver, and brass; the museum displays samples.

Carvings by famous names like Junghanel, Klaus Mertens, Karl, Olaf Kolbe, Petersen, Christian Ulbricht and especially the Steinbach nutcrackers have become collectors' items. Herr Christian Steinbach, also known as the "King of Nutcrackers", started the tradition of hand-carving nutcrackers and is being continued by his daughter, Karla Steinbach. [Steinbach Nutcrackers](#) vary greatly in price, anywhere from \$200 to over \$1000, depending on the collectibility factor and availability.

## Functional

Manufacturers produce modern nutcrackers — designed solely to crack nuts — usually somewhat resembling pliers, but with the pivot point at the end beyond the nut, rather than in the middle. End-users also utilise them for cracking the shells of crab and lobster in order to make the meat inside available for eating.

Parrots use their beaks as natural nutcrackers, in much the same way smaller birds crack seeds. In this case, the pivot point stands opposite the nut, at the jaw.

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## Christmas ornament

**Christmas ball** (also called a **bauble** in British English

**Christmas ornaments** are decorations (usually made of glass, metal, wood or ceramics) that are used to festoon a [Christmas tree](#).

Ornaments take many different forms, from a simple round ball to highly artistic designs. Ornaments are almost always



reused year after year, rather than purchased annually, and family collections often contain a combination of commercially produced ornaments and decorations created by family members.

[Santa Claus](#) is a commonly used figure. Candy canes, fruit, animals and snowflake imagery are also popular choices

Lucretia P. Hale's story "The Peterkins' Christmas-Tree"<sup>[1]</sup> offers a short catalog of the sorts of ornaments used in the 1870s:

There was every kind of gilt hanging-thing, from gilt pea-pods to butterflies on springs.

There were shining flags and lanterns, and bird-cages, and nests with birds sitting on them, baskets of fruit, gilt apples, and bunches of grapes."

The modern-day Christmas ornament was descended from the 18th century witch ball used to ward off evil spirits.

## Notes

- [\[1\]](#) Lucretia P. Hale, *The Peterkin Papers*. 1960; Houghton Mifflin

## See also

- [Christmas pickle](#)

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# Pagan beliefs surrounding Christmas

The month of December holds one of the most celebrated holidays in the world, [Christmas](#). Nevertheless, many people celebrate this holiday without noting its pagan roots such as, dates, customs, and traditions.

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## Jesus' birth

The [Bible](#) gives no certain answer to the date of Jesus' birth, but it does give clues. Luke 2:8-14 speaks of shepherds living outdoor and tending to a flock of sheep. The text reads, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their

flock by night." Scholars of the Bible have concluded that this would be highly unlikely in the month of December, for the weather conditions would be too cold to live outside or tend to a flock of sheep. In addition, it is also unlikely that Augustus would force Jews to trek to their home cities under the cold and rainy seasons.

## **Why do people celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25?**

It is uncertain why December 25th was chosen. One theory is that it was influenced by pagan ( ancient polytheistic religions) holidays. Before the Romans converted to Christianity, they celebrated the popular holiday Saturnalia, a festival of feasting and revelry held in December in celebration of Saturn, the god of agriculture, and the winter solstice.

Kelly Wittmann wrote, "In 350, Pope Julius I declared that Christ's birth would be celebrated on December 25. There is wide acceptance of the belief that Pope Julius I was trying to make it as painless as possible for pagan Romans, who remained a majority at that time, to convert to Christianity. The new religion went down a bit easier, knowing that their feasts would not be taken away from them." Moreover, in ancient Babylon, December 25th was the feast of the Son of Isis, Goddess of Nature, was celebrated with, "Raucous partying, gluttonous eating and drinking, and gift-giving were traditions of this feast.

## **Traditions**

### **Kissing under mistletoe**

Another aspect of Christmas that receives much criticism is its traditions. Traditions such as kissing under mistletoe are very popular, but have no Biblical reference at all. Once more, this tradition has its roots entwined in pagan beliefs. Bill McLain wrote in his book, "There are many legends about mistletoe. One Scandinavian legend states that Loki, the god of mischief, killed Baldur, the god of peace, by shooting him with an arrow made from mistletoe. Other gods and goddesses were saddened by Baldur's death and asked that his life be restored, which it was. In appreciation, his mother Frigga hung up the mistletoe and promised to kiss all who passed under it. Because of this, mistletoe became the symbol of both forgiveness and love." There are also few other beliefs of mistletoe from around the world. During the Middle Ages, people would hang mistletoe over doors and on their ceilings to scare off evil spirits and prevent witches from entering. In addition, there is an old superstition that if you place a twig of mistletoe under your pillow you will not have any nightmares and it sometimes believed that it was once used as a way to announce your love interest, if two kissed under a mistletoe it was a way of publicly stating that he wished to wed the lady.

### **The Christmas tree**

It is safe to say that the [Christmas tree](#) is one of the most recognized symbols of Christmas, yet the origins of the Christmas tree are not clear. There is a legend that Saint Boniface started the custom of the Christmas tree in Germany around the eighth century. It is said that Saint Boniface found a group of pagan worshipping an oak tree and became angry;

consequently, he proceeded to cut down the Oak tree. Immediately a small fir tree is said to sprout from the middle of the oak stump and reached to the sky. Thus Saint Boniface told the onlookers that this would be their holy tree because it was evergreen, a symbol of everlasting life. Although many versions of this story exist, many authorities believe that the true origins come from ancient Egypt. Bill McLain writes, "On December 21, the shortest day of the year, ancient Egyptians decorated their homes with green palm branches to symbolize life's triumph over death." Before Christianity, plants and trees that remained green through out the year were believed to have special meaning for people in winter. Bill McLain continues explaining, "Romans used evergreens to decorate their homes during the winter festival of Saturnalia, which honored Saturn, the god of farming." In addition, Ancient Druids, a member of an order of priests in ancient Gaul and Britain who appear in Welsh and Irish legend as prophets and sorcerers, were known to place evergreen branches over doors to frighten away evil spirits.

## Yule log

The origin of the Christmas tree is started in Germany where it was worshiped by German pagans believing in Thor, the Norwegian God of thunder. In order to convert these pagans a Christian missionary told them that his God is more powerful than theirs. To prove this fact he said that he can cut Thors' tree down without being punished by the Gods. Henceforth after that the Christmas tree was the evergreen.

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## Pasterka

**Pasterka** is a midnight mass celebrated between 24 and 25 december in Poland. A close translation of the name would be "Shepards' Mass". This is a reference to the [biblical](#) shepards, who were visited by an angel and told of the birth of Christ.

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## Christmas pickle



The **Christmas Pickle** is a tradition in which the family decorates a [Christmas tree](#), placing a glass pickle ornament on the tree. On [Christmas](#) morning, the first child to find the pickle on the tree would get a special gift and would supposedly have a year of good fortune.

This tradition is said to come from Germany, but this is probably apocryphal. In fact, the tradition is widely unknown in Germany.

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## Pumpkin pie



**Pumpkin pie** is a traditional North American dessert usually made in the late fall and early winter, especially for Halloween, Thanksgiving, and [Christmas](#).

The pie consists of a squash-based custard, ranging in color from orange to brown, baked in a single pie shell, rarely with a top crust. Contrary to popular belief, traditional jack-o'-lantern-type pumpkins make coarsely textured pies. The pie is generally flavored with nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and ginger and is traditionally served with whipped cream, although in parts of Canada it is commonly served with maple syrup instead.

In the USA, this pie is normally made from canned pumpkin or canned pumpkin pie filling (spices including pumpkin all spice); this is a seasonal product available in bakeries and grocery stores. In other countries it is normally made from scratch from whole pumpkins.

The holiday carol "There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays" makes a reference to homemade pumpkin pie being looked forward to by a man returning to his family's home in Pennsylvania.

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## Rich's Great Tree



The **Rich's Great Tree** is a live, life-size, outdoor [Christmas tree](#) that has been an Atlanta tradition since 1947. That year, the Rich's department store put a large pine tree atop its downtown store, lighting it on Thanksgiving night.

It later included the Pink Pig named Priscilla, a carnival ride of sorts around the store's toy department. A second one, named Percival, was later added on the roof, around the base of the tree. Riders got a sticker that said "I rode the Pink Pig" when riding either one, inspiring the book *I Rode the Pink Pig: Atlanta's Favorite Christmas Tradition*. The ride moved to the [Festival of Trees](#) in the 1990s, and resided at the Atlanta History Center until it was brought back to the tree site in 2004.

After the Rich's chain was sold to Federated Department Stores, it abandoned the store in the 1990s and moved the tree to nearby Underground Atlanta. Since 2000, Underground has also been abandoned in favor of Lenox Square, which is not near downtown or midtown. The tradition continues as of Thanksgiving 2005 as **The Great Tree at Macy's**. [\[1\]](#)

The tree itself is usually around 75 feet (23 meters) tall, and contains several miles of wiring, thousands of [Christmas lights](#), hundreds of basketball-sized [Christmas ornaments](#) and mirror balls, and dozens of strobe lights for effect. It also has a huge lighted snowflake tree topper seven feet (two meters) in diameter. It uptakes hundreds of gallons of water each day (depending on the weather and humidity), along with bottles of aspirin to keep the tree fresh.

The lighting ceremony occurs on Thanksgiving night from 7:00PM to 8:00PM, no matter the weather; and is aired on WSB-TV 2. [Christmas carols](#) are sung by various musical celebrities and local groups, and at least one is usually chimed by a bell choir. The tree is lit on the highest note of "O Holy Night", and remains lit every night at least through New Year's Eve.

Originally, eight choirs sang from the Crystal Bridge, which connected all but the lower two levels of the downtown Rich's over Forsyth Street. One choir was stationed on each side of each of the four floors, ordered from bottom to top and alternating from side to side. Faux stained glass panels were put in the glass on either side (left and right) of each choir, giving the ceremony an almost church-like effect. Street lights were turned off in the area below so there was no glare for the thousands of spectators that gathered every year regardless of the weather.

In 2004, the tree from Snellville snapped about two-thirds of the way up while workers were attempting to use a crane to lift it from the ground to the roof. Since the tree was rather late in being set up to begin with (November 14th is only 11 days before Thanksgiving), a replacement tree (always selected in case of an emergency such as this) was being rushed in from nearby Lithia Springs. In 2003, it took eight workers three weeks to accomplish the massive decorating task.

## See also

- [Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree](#)
- [National Christmas Tree](#)

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## Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree

The **Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree** is found in New York City's Rockefeller Center, and is lit every December, an event usually broadcast on national television in the United States. It has been put up since 1937, and has grown to be a New York tradition. After [Christmas](#), the tree is recycled for a variety of uses, including mulch, while the largest part of the tree is used for jumping by the United States Equestrian Team.

A book has been written, *The Christmas Tree at Rockefeller Center* ISBN 0-9650308-7-3.

### See also

- [Rich's Great Tree](#)
- [National Christmas Tree](#)

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## Royal Christmas Message

The **Royal Christmas Message** (currently coined **The Queen's Christmas Message**) is broadcast by the British Sovereign to the Commonwealth at [Christmas](#). The tradition began in 1932 with a radio broadcast by George V on the BBC Empire Service. Today the broadcast is made on television.

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## History

The idea for a Christmas Message from the Sovereign to the Commonwealth was originally mooted in 1932 by the founding father of the BBC, Sir John Reith. The idea of the speech was to inaugurate the then Empire Service, which is now known as the BBC World Service.

The first Royal Christmas Message was issued by George V in 1932. The King was originally hesitant about using the relatively untried medium of radio to issue a Christmas Message. However he was reassured by a visit to the BBC in the summer of 1932, and agreed to try out the idea. So in 1932 on [Christmas Day](#), King George V issued a Christmas Message from a small office in Sandringham House to the Empire via "wireless".

George VI continued the Christmas broadcasts. Perhaps his best known was delivered in 1939, in the opening stages of the Second World War, and contained the famous lines starting: "I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year". Edward VIII abdicated before his first [Christmas](#) on the Throne, and therefore never issued a Christmas Message.

The tradition has been continued by the present Queen, Elizabeth II. Her first Christmas Message to the Commonwealth took place from the study at Sandringham House at 15:07 GMT on 25 December 1952 and was broadcast to the nation by BBC radio. She has delivered the traditional Message each Christmas ever since with the exception of 1969, and they have been fully televised since 1957. The message is broadcast in the UK at 3pm (15:00 GMT), and broadcast around the Commonwealth. In non-Commonwealth countries the Christmas Message can be heard on BBC radio or television, or can be downloaded at any time after 15:00 GMT on the Royal Family's website or other websites.

## Messages by year

- 1932: First royal Christmas Message was issued by George V.  
1939: George VI's first and best known speech in the opening stages of the Second World War containing the famous line: "I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year".  
1952: Queen makes first Christmas speech. She sat in the same chair and used the same desk as her father, George VI, and his father, George V, had previously done and she began with: "Each Christmas, at this time, my beloved father broadcast a message to his people in all parts of the world. Today I am doing this to you, who are now my people." This Message, and the ones until 1957, were also broadcast in sound only on television in the UK.
- 1955: With the launch of ITV in the UK, the sound-only television broadcast was simulcast on both ITV and the BBC Television Service from this year on.  
1957: The Queen's Message was televised in-vision for the first time.  
1960: The Queen started to record her Christmas Messages.  
1969: No Christmas Message was broadcast in this year, apparently as the Queen felt that she had been on television too much due to Richard Cawston's The Royal Family documentary. A repeat of an episode from the documentary was broadcast on Christmas day.

1970: Tradition was reinstated with the broadcast again taking place.

1979: Ceefax was used for the first time providing subtitles for the hard of hearing.

1980: The Queen's Christmas broadcast attracted a record of 28 million British viewers.

1986–1991: Between these years the Christmas broadcast was produced by Sir David Attenborough.

1988: The Queen added a supplementary message referring to the Clapham Junction rail crash, Lockerbie disaster and the Armenian earthquake which had happened since the main broadcast was videotaped.

1992: Sad times for the royal family as the Queen called the year *annus horribilis* (Latin for "horrible year"). The speech was leaked beforehand to The Sun.

1997: Broadcast produced by Independent Television News for the first time, beginning a period of alternating production with the BBC.

1998: The Queen's Message first appeared on the Internet.

2001: The Queen refers to the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, underscoring their widespread effect felt across the Commonwealth.

2003: The Queen makes her 50th Christmas Message.

2004: A strong appeal for religious tolerance in the Commonwealth and beyond (see below). In a break from tradition, Her Majesty also sent a separate radio Christmas message to UK troops, which was broadcast by the British Forces Broadcasting Service.

### **The 1995 Christmas Message (BBC)**

The 1995 broadcast began with a reminder of the 50th anniversary celebrations for VE-day and VJ-day. The Queen said that remembrance was an important part of our life, paying tribute to those who had served and those who had not returned. She then turned to present-day conflicts such as Bosnia in which British and Commonwealth forces were serving, and to the full year of peace in Northern Ireland. The Queen then referred to her Buckingham Palace invitation to voluntary workers working throughout the world, and picked out the work of Sister Ethel, a nun working in South Africa to help children in the townships. She ended by paying tribute to peacemakers throughout the world.

### **The 1996 Christmas Message (BBC)**

The Queen reminisced about family Christmases of her youth, and welcomed the fact that her grandchildren were now able to join her. She paid tribute to Parliamentary democracy, expressing the ideal of the equality of all citizens under the law. She referred to her overseas visits, including Poland and the Czech Republic which had until 1989 been Communist controlled, and to the state visit to Britain of Nelson Mandela as an example of how to accept the facts of the past without bitterness and look forward with courage and optimism. She encouraged people not to look back and say "if only", but to look forward and say "if only".

### **The 1997 Christmas Message (ITN)**

This message had a theme of the intertwining of joy and sadness. It opened with contrasting pictures of Westminster Abbey, which the Queen reminded viewers had that year been the scene of the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales as well as the celebration of her Golden Wedding Anniversary. She paid tribute to Diana and spoke of the joy of her married life, and then reminded viewers of the fire at Windsor Castle before showing them the restored rooms after their completion. She then reminded viewers of her trips to Canada, India and Pakistan, and to Hong Kong to mark its return to China, before paying tribute to the Commonwealth Prime Minister's gathering. Viewers saw her meeting with Nelson Mandela. At the conclusion, Her Majesty welcomed the imminent devolution of power to Scotland and Wales, and spoke of the benefits of being a United Kingdom.

### **The 2001 Christmas Message (ITN)**

The Queen referred to the fact that the year 2001 had provided many people with an unusual number of trials and disasters. She made reference to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak before coming to the September 11th attacks which reminded her of the plight of innocent victims. Viewers saw the occasion when The National Anthem of the USA, The Star-Spangled Banner, was played at the Changing of the Guard. Her Majesty then spoke of the importance of faith when drawing strength in troubled times, and paid tribute to those who work for others in the community. She called for strengthened communities in the months to come.

### **The 2003 Christmas Message (ITN)**

The opening of this message was recorded at the Household Cavalry barracks in Windsor, a rare 'outside broadcast'. With many members of the Armed forces on foreign deployments, especially in Iraq, the Queen encouraged the audience to think of those not with their families at Christmas, and paid tribute to the work they had done to bring peace. She also spoke of the importance of teamwork and of what she had learned when presenting the new Queen's Golden Jubilee Award for Voluntary Service in the Community.

### **The 2004 Christmas Message (BBC)**

The 2004 Christmas Message—The Queen's 52nd such Message—started, as usual, with the national anthem, God Save the Queen, and then moved on to footage of Her Majesty handing out presents to her own family. In the radio version broadcasted by BBC Radio 4, the national anthem is heard after the message. The theme of the message was cultural and religious diversity and the benefits of tolerance. It was interspersed with coverage of The Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles attending various multicultural meetings, including footage of Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh visiting a Sikh Gurdwara (temple), and the Prince of Wales visiting a school for Muslims in east London.

## **Reaction**

The message was warmly received by leaders of Britain's Muslim community, with Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, saying that the Queen's words carried a "very powerful message" that is very timely and "duly reflects British society and that of the Commonwealth in that it shows we are a multicultural society". Zaki Badawi, founder of the Muslim College in London, also welcomed the Message. He said: "The Crown belongs to all of us. Whatever our religious belief, our racial origin or country of birth, we can express our loyalty to the Crown, and the crown extends its care to all of us."

The president of Guru Nanak gurdwara in south Birmingham, and a leading Sikh critic of the controversial play *Behzti*, Mohan Singh, said "It is great that someone with such a high position in authority is saying these things." He said tolerance was "core to [their] beliefs" in the Sikh faith, and that the Queen had probably "focused on multiculturalism because of what is happening in Iraq and the response in Britain, and perhaps what happened with the Sikh play in Birmingham. When you see the bad aspects of any religion or culture being portrayed all the time, that breeds intolerance, and she is trying to address that, which should be commended."

The speech was denounced by some right-wingers, with Stuart Millson writing a critical article in *Right Now!*.

## **The 2005 Christmas Message (ITN)**

The 2005 message was particularly sombre, with the Queen reflecting on such tragedies as the Asian tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the 7 July 2005 London bombings. She also praised as "quite remarkable" the humanitarian responses from people of all faiths.

Although the message was on the whole well received, there was comment in many national newspapers following the broadcast on the absence of any mention of the Wedding of Charles, Prince of Wales and Camilla Parker Bowles, with some describing it as a "snub".

## **Alternative Christmas message**

Since 1993, Channel 4 has broadcast an "Alternative Christmas message" featuring a contemporary, often controversial celebrity, delivering a message in the manner of Her Majesty. This tradition started by accident when, running a series of programmes on 'Christmas in New York', the channel invited Quentin Crisp to give an Alternative message - playing on the pejorative term 'Queen' meaning a male homosexual. In contrast to the Queen's message, the alternative lasts only 3 to 5 minutes.

## List of Alternative Message Presenters

- 1993 - Quentin Crisp
- 1994 - Rev Jesse Jackson
- 1995 - Brigitte Bardot
- 1996 - Rory Bremner (as Diana, Princess of Wales)
- 1997 - Margaret Gibney, a Belfast schoolgirl broadcast a plea for peace in Northern Ireland
- 1998 - Doreen Lawrence and Neville Lawrence, parents of Stephen Lawrence
- 1999 - Ali G
- 2000 - Helen Jeffries, mother of a CJD victim
- 2001 - Genelle Guzman, World Trade Center terrorist attacks survivor
- 2002 - Sharon Osbourne
- 2003 - Barry and Michelle Seabourn, a Merseyside couple who appeared on Channel 4 reality show Wife Swap.
- 2004 - Marge Simpson
- 2005 - Jamie Oliver

## 2004 Alternative Message

Marge was chosen to give the message due to Channel 4's recent acquisition of rights to broadcast *The Simpsons*.

In it she commented on David and Victoria Beckham's marriage in a negative comparison with hers and Homer's, and compared the special relationship between the UK and the US to that of Mini Me and Dr. Evil in the Austin Powers films ("Helping out in all our zany schemes to take over the world"). Lisa Simpson also held a banner supporting Cornwall's secession: "UK OUT OF CORNWALL," while chanting "Rydhys rag Kernow lemmyn" (freedom for Cornwall now).

## 2005 Alternative Message

The majority of Jamie Oliver's message was in the form of a comedy sketch, where he was a school cook preparing junk food, including "Turkey Twangers", for children. This turned out to be a nightmare, and he awoke to give a message about his wish for the new year being for British children to be fed better. He was chosen to deliver the message following his successful Jamie's School Dinners series. The broadcast also featured actress Jessica Stevenson as a dinnerlady.

For the first time, sister channel E4 broadcast an "alternative to the alternative message", delivered by Avid Merrion, the creation of comedian Leigh Francis from the series Bo' Selecta!.

## Elsewhere

In Spain King Juan Carlos I issues a New Year's Eve message of a similar tone that is broadcasted simultaneously by most of the Spanish TV channels. The presidents of the autonomous communities that have a local TV channel air their messages on Christmas Eve.

In Canada the Governor General of Canada issues a New Year's Eve message of a similar tone that is broadcasted simultaneously by Radio-Canada and the CBC.

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## Santa Claus parade



Eaton's Santa Claus Parade, 1918, Toronto, Canada. Having arrived at the Eaton's store, Santa is readying his ladder to climb up onto the building.

**Santa Claus parades** or **Christmas pageants** are parades held in some countries to celebrate the official opening of the [Christmas](#) season with the arrival of [Santa Claus](#). The parades usually include themed floats, dancing or marching groups and bands playing [Christmas songs](#). They are moving pageants that typically end near the center of a city. Oftentimes sponsored by department stores, they may reinforce the store's brand recognition during the important Christmas shopping season.

## History

It is a direct descendant of late Medieval and Renaissance revivals of Roman Triumphs, which had music and banners, wagons filled with the spoils of war, and climaxed with the dux riding in a chariot, drawn by two horses, and thus called the biga. (A quadriga such as



surmounts the Brandenburg Gate is drawn by four horses.) Similarly, the climax of a Santa Claus parade is always Santa in his sleigh, drawn by eight reindeer (an octigia). Roman Triumphs were themselves consciously modeled on ceremonies honoring the gods, and Santa Claus himself is the descendant of [Saint Nicholas](#). The Santa Claus parade directly corresponds to the modern *triumphal entry* of Santa Claus.

## Notable parades

Santa Claus parades are most common in North America. The largest is [Toronto Santa Claus Parade](#), held annually near the middle of November in Toronto, which was started in 1905 by the Eaton's department store, with just a single float. It now has over 24 floats, 24 bands, and 1,700 participants. It is one of the biggest productions in North America, and is broadcast to many countries around the world.

In New York City, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, famous for its giant helium-filled balloons, began in the 1920s, inspired by the Eaton's parade in Canada, with Macy's employees in costume, and— a distinctively Roman touch— animals borrowed from the Central Park Zoo. The giant balloons made an early appearance, with Felix the Cat in 1927. The inflation of the balloons in the streets flanking the American Museum of Natural History the night before has become a traditional gathering for New York's Upper West Side.

Peoria, Illinois has the longest running Santa Claus Parade in the U.S. The 118th Parade was held November 25, 2005; 1887 marked the first year of the parade, which consisted of boats and derricks coming down the river as part of construction of the new bridge. In 1888, Peoria held a parade through town, celebrating the completion of the new Upper Free Bridge. The following December, Schipper and Block Department Store sponsored a parade that followed the same route and featured Santa Claus. Various attractions in the parade through the years include fireworks, circus wagons, a calliope, live reindeer and numerous parade floats. The parade was first televised in 1958.

The Hollywood Christmas Parade in Southern California is a seasonal tradition that somewhat competes with the Rose Parade and the Doo Dah Parade.

Elsewhere, especially in Commonwealth countries, Santa Claus parades are usually known as Christmas pageants. The largest is the Adelaide Christmas Pageant, which was begun in 1933 and is held annually in November. The pageant is televised around Australia. Major pageants are also held in the New Zealand cities of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

## See also

- [Santa's Grotto](#)

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## Santa's Grotto

**Santa's Grotto** is the mythological workshop where [Santa Claus](#) makes the toys and presents given out at [Christmas](#).

In the 20th century it became common during December in large shops or department stores to have a "cavern" in which an actor dressed up as Santa Claus to give gifts to children. Grottos can be large-walk through fantasy cavern-like areas incorporating animatronic characters such as elves and pantomime characters. This tradition probably started around the start of the 20th Century in London or New York in the largest department stores to attract customers.

In Adelaide, South Australia, the similar "Magic Cave" was set up in the John Martin's department store in Rundle Mall after the annual store-sponsored Christmas Pageant. Since the closure of John Martin's, David Jones department stores have continued the tradition of the Magic Cave, in Adelaide as well as in other Australian capitals.

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## Santon

A **santon** is a small figurine cast in terracotta or a similar material that is used for building nativity scenes. Santons are a traditional product of the Provence region of southeastern France.

The word "santon" comes from the Provençal "santoun," or "little saint." They became popular during the French Revolution, when the churches were closed and the larger, traditional nativity scenes in churches prohibited. Smaller figurines began appearing in homes, and quickly gained popularity.

One of the more famous santonniers (artisans who make santons) in Aix-en-Provence was Jean Baptiste Fouque, who founded the Maison Fouque.<sup>[1]</sup> He also began an annual fair in Aix for santonniers to display their wares.

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## Christmas stamp

Most nations of the world issue **Christmas stamps**, postage stamps with a [Christmas](#) theme and intended for use on holiday mail such as [Christmas cards](#). These stamps are regular postage stamps, unlike [Christmas seals](#), and are valid for postage year-round. They usually go on sale some time between early October and early December, and are printed in considerable quantities.

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## History



This stamp's Christmas connection is in the "XMAS 1898" at the bottom of the map.

It is a matter of some debate as to which is the first Christmas stamp. The Canadian map stamp of 1898 bears an inscription "XMAS 1898", but it was actually issued to mark the inauguration of the Imperial Penny Postage rate. The Christmas connection has long been reported to have been the result of quick thinking; Mulock was proposing that it be issued on 9 November, to "honor the Prince" (meaning the Prince of Wales), but when Queen Victoria asked "what Prince?" in a displeased manner, Mulock realized the danger, and answered "Why, the Prince of Peace, ma'am".

In 1937, Austria issued two "Christmas greeting stamps" featuring a rose and zodiac signs. In 1939, Brazil issued four semi-postal stamps with designs featuring the three kings and a star, an angel and child, the Southern Cross and a child, and a mother and child. In 1941 Hungary also issued a semi-postal whose additional fees were to pay for "soldiers' Christmas". The first stamps to depict the Nativity was the Hungary issue of 1943, pictured at left. These were all one-time issues, more like commemorative stamps than regular issues.

The next Christmas stamps did not appear until the 1950s, when Cuba issued designs with poinsettias and bells (1951), followed by Haiti (1954), Luxembourg and Spain (1955), the Australia, Korea, and Liechtenstein (1957). In cases such as Australia, the issuance

marked the first of what became an annual tradition. Many more nations took up the practice during the 1960s.



First Christmas stamp of Australia, 1957

By the 1990s, approximately 160 postal administrations were issuing Christmas stamps, mostly on an annual basis. Islamic countries constitute the largest group of non-participants, although the Palestinian Authority has issued Christmas stamps since 1995.

## Designs

Although some tropical islands produce large-format Christmas stamps primarily intended for sale to stamp collectors, for the rest of the world, Christmas stamps are "working stamps" that will be used in large numbers to send greeting cards and postcards. Accordingly, the stamps tend to be normal-sized, and offered in one or a few denominations, for instance to cover differing domestic and international rates.

The choice of designs is highly variable, ranging from an overtly religious image of the Nativity, to secular images of [Christmas trees](#), wreaths, [Santa Claus](#), and so forth. A country may maintain a unified theme for several years, then change it drastically, in some cases seemingly to follow "fashion moves" by other countries. For instance, during the 1970s many countries issued Christmas stamps featuring children's drawings, with the young artist identified by name and age.

The choice of secular or religious designs is frequently a bone of contention; church leaders often see secular designs as diluting the meaning of the holiday, while postal officials fear that overly religious designs could lead their secular customers to avoid the stamps, leaving millions unsold, and even expose the postal administration to charges that they are violating laws prohibiting the promotion of a particular religion.

In the United States, annual discord over "secular" versus "religious" designs was resolved by issuing some of each; typically a group of 4-6 related secular designs, plus a Madonna and Child design. To avoid difficulties attendant upon contracting for original designs with a religious theme, the designs are based on an Old Master paintings hanging in U.S. galleries, thus qualifying as depictions of art.

## Usage

The usual usage of Christmas stamps is to quickly apply them to a stack of Christmas cards to go out. In the age of email, Christmas stamps may represent some individuals' largest remaining use of stamps in a year, and it is not unusual to see "leftovers" appear on regular mail during the first months of the new year, Except in Australia where Christmas stamps are only valid during the holiday season and cannot be used for regular mail, but only Christmas cards. This is because they Australian Christmas stamp is valued 5c lower than regular postage stamps.

## Collecting

Christmas is a popular theme for topical collecting. Because of the quantities printed, almost all Christmas stamps are easy to come by and of negligible cost. Collecting challenges would be to get covers with apropos postal markings, such as a postmark on Christmas day (not all post offices get the day off), from a location such as North Pole, Alaska, North Pole, New York, Santa Claus, Indiana, or Christmas Island, or slogan postmarks with a Christmas theme.

The Christmas Philatelic Club was formed in 1969 by Christmas stamp collectors, and has issued its bimonthly journal, the [Yule Log](#) since that time. A number of collectors treat Christmas collecting as a subcategory of religion on stamps.

## Other holiday stamps

In Japan, there is a longstanding tradition of a New Years stamp. A number of [Easter](#) stamps have been issued, but these are clearly aimed at collectors.

The United States has occasionally issued stamps for New Years and Thanksgiving. During the 1990s, stamps for Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Eid, and Chinese New Year have become a regular part of the holiday program, although the designs tend be used for several years, distinguishable only by a different denomination or year date.

Valentine's Day stamps are a more recent tradition in some countries.

## References

- Waller Sager and Kathleen Berry, *75 Years of Christmas Stamps* (1971)
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## Christmas stocking

A **Christmas stocking** is an empty sock or sock-shaped bag that children in the United States and some other cultures hang on [Christmas Eve](#) so that [Santa Claus](#) can fill it with small toys, candy, fruit, coins, or other small gifts when he arrives. These small items are often referred to as **stocking stuffers** or **stocking fillers**. Tradition in western culture dictates that a child who behaves badly during the year will receive only a piece of coal.

By tradition, the stocking is hung on the fireplace, but, since many modern homes do not have fireplaces, stockings may be hung in almost any location.

One traditional practice is to reserve the stocking for five gifts that stimulate each of the five senses, for example:

- Something to eat like fruit or candy
- A toy or other item that makes a noise (this can even include nuts to *crack*)
- Something that has tactile appeal such as modeling clay, a soft toy, lingerie or even a pair of novelty Christmas socks.
- Any item with a distinctive scent such as bubble-bath, cologne, perfume, etc.

Originally, children simply used one of their everyday socks, but eventually special Christmas stockings were created for this purpose. Today, stores carry a tremendous variety of styles and sizes of Christmas stockings, from small and conservative, to long and stretchy, to gigantic.

Many families create their own Christmas stockings with each family member's name applied to the stocking so that Santa (or the family members) aren't confused about which stocking belongs to which family member.

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## Striezelmarkt

The **Striezelmarkt** in Dresden is one of Germany's oldest documented [Christmas](#) markets. It was first mentioned in 1434, under Friedrich II, an Elector of Saxony, when it was held the Monday before Christmas on the Altmarkt square. Over the centuries it has developed into a huge event with 250 stands, taking up a large part of Dresden city centre and lasting throughout the Advent period. Today the Striezelmarkt attracts 2 million visitors a year from all over the world, and Dresden's twin town Columbus, Ohio has adopted the tradition, too.

The word *Striezelmarkt* comes from *Strüzel* or *Stroczel*, which was the name of a type of cake sold at the market, now famous as [Stollen](#) or *Christstollen*. *Stollen* is a light airy fruitcake which is quite low in sugar, today available in many parts of the world. The true Dresden *Stollen*, however, is produced in the city and distinguished by a special seal depicting the city's famous king, August the Strong. The shape of the cake is meant to be reminiscent of the entrance to a mine tunnel (the literal meaning of *Stollen*) reflecting the area's silver and tin mining history.

At the centre of the Striezelmarkt stands a 20m high spruce, brought from the nearby Tharandt woods and decorated with lights. At the back of the market square there is a painted wooden fairy-tale castle which is also a giant [Advent calendar](#). A door is opened

every day by children's entertainers, with a puppet show, and on Fridays there is a visit by [Father Christmas](#) himself.

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## Features of today's Striezelmarkt

### Wooden Ornaments

Many of the stands at the Striezelmarkt sell wooden ornaments of a huge variety of shapes and sizes. This comes from the area's mining history. Dresden is the largest city near the *Erzgebirge*, or Ore Mountains, where silver and tin were discovered in around 1168. The discovery brought many miners to the area, who then lost their jobs as the German Peasants' War and competition from abroad took their toll. Needing a new way of earning money, the miners took up woodcarving, incorporating mining symbols and religious elements into their designs. These symbols can still be found in the Christmas ornaments sold at the Striezelmarkt.

- Candle pyramids

In many parts of Germany, the candle pyramid (lightstock) is brought out every year to light up the room at Christmas. Two to five round wooden tiers, gradually smaller towards the top, are built onto a central rod which rotates, driven by the heat of candles rising up into a rotor at the top. On each tier there are figures connected with Christmas. The whole ornament is usually about 50 cm high, but the tallest pyramid in the world takes pride of place at the Striezelmarkt, towering a full 14m in the air. Originally, the pyramid was a much simpler affair, simply a frame to hang sprigs of fir upon; the modern-day pyramid did not evolve until the early 19th century.

- Schwibbogen

Literally, the word *Schwibbogen* means an arch "hanging" (*schweben*) above you, between two walls. This candle-holder is indeed arch-shaped, representing the arched entrance to a mine hung with guiding lights; another connection to the area's mining past. Today the "candles" are often lit with electricity, and the scenes cut out of the wooden centre of the arch are not only on mining themes. At night during Advent, nearly every single window in Dresden is lit with these ornaments, traditionally bought at the Striezelmarkt.

- Räuchermann (smoking man)

Another ornament always present at Christmas-time in Germany, the smoking man is hollowed out with a hole leading to his mouth, hung with a pipe. An incense candle is placed inside him so that he appears to smoke as it burns. There is a wide variety of variations on the smoking man, including old ladies in rocking chairs, Father Christmases, and figures representing nearly every occupation. Smoking men first appeared on the Striezelmarkt in the 19th century.



- Nutcrackers

The type of nutcracker traditionally sold at the Striezelmarkt, carved and painted with a red coat like a soldier, probably became popular world-wide thanks to Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite". The first wood turner to carve the ornaments in this form, Wilhelm Friedrich Füchtner from the Ore Mountains, is said to have been inspired by the nutcracker in the story book Tchaikovsky's ballet came from.

## Food and drink

Apart from the famous *Stollen*, other specialities originate from Dresden and were originally sold at the Striezelmarkt.

- Pflaumentoffel

Although they are made of prunes, these little figures are really decorations, although they can be eaten after Christmas. *Pflaumentoffel* means *plum devil*; they were also called *Feuerrüpel* or *Fiery Santa*, although they are not meant to be devils or Santas, but chimney sweeps, all dressed in black (the prunes) with a top hat and a brush. Until the 20th century, Pflaumentoffel were sold at the Striezelmarkt on trays carried by children trying to earn some Christmas money. The artist Ludwig Richter famously portrayed these *Striezelkinder* in 1853 in his woodcut "Ausverkauft wegen Geschäftsaufgabe" ("Sold out as giving up business"). In 1910, however, sale by children was banned at the Striezelmarkt.

- Pulsnitzer Pfefferkuchen (Pulsnitz gingerbread)

The Christmas market at Nuremberg (Christkindlmarkt) is more famous for its [gingerbread](#) known as Lebkuchen, but the Striezelmarkt's gingerbread has nearly as long a history. Pfefferkuchen literally means "pepper cake": the word "pepper" was used to mean any new foreign spice. The gingerbread sold at the Striezelmarkt comes from Pulsnitz, a town about 50 km from Dresden; it was first mentioned as a speciality from Pulsnitz in a decree issued in 1558 allowing bakers to produce it there. Pfefferkuchen are usually filled with marmalade or jam and covered with chocolate. Unlike gingerbread from other countries, the dough does not usually contain any fat, or indeed ginger, but instead nutmeg, cinnamon, ground cloves and allspice, which are added after the dough has been left up to 6 months to mature. In 1780 eight master bakers came personally from Pulsnitz to sell their wares at the Striezelmarkt; today there are many more Pfefferkuchen stands, but the gingerbread is usually sold by hired staff.

- Glühwein (mulled wine)

One very well-loved tradition on a cold December night in Dresden is drinking steaming mugs of [mulled wine](#) at the Striezelmarkt. The hot red wine spiced with cloves and cinnamon is served in specially decorated mugs.

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## Toronto Santa Claus Parade





Eaton's Santa Claus Parade, 1918, Toronto, Canada. Having arrived at the Eaton's store, Santa is readying his ladder to climb up onto the building.

One of the best known [Santa Claus parades](#) is the **Toronto Santa Claus Parade**, held annually near the middle of November in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The Toronto Santa Claus Parade was started in 1905 by the Eaton's department store, with just a single float. It now has over 24 floats, 24 bands, and 1,700 participants. It is one of the biggest productions in North America, and is broadcast to many countries around the world, primarily by CanWest Global-owned networks.

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## Tree topper

A **tree topper** is a decorative star, angel or other item which is placed on the crown of a [Christmas tree](#). If viewed in a religious context, the tree topper usually signifies the Christmas Star of Bethlehem or angelic hosts which proclaimed the news of the birth of Jesus to the world on the eve of his birth.

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## Christmas village

A **Christmas village** is a decorative miniature-scale village often set up at [Christmas](#). Much of the imagery these villages are designed after comes from Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. These towns depict classic Victorian era scenes, and are often supplied with lights to illuminate their interiors. They are sometimes strung with their own micro-miniature [Christmas lights](#), and have accessories available such as street lights and lighted trees.

The houses themselves are usually made of ceramic or porcelain, and are usually placed under a [Christmas tree](#), often on a sheet of fluffy white quilt batting to simulate snow. A model train may also be run through the village, and some setups can be quite elaborate and expansive. Smaller setups are often placed on a fireplace mantelpiece or in a large bay window, or arranged on shelves where space is limited.

One of the first and most prominent companies making the collectible villages is Department 56, however Lemax is quite common in the U.S. now. Artist Thomas Kinkade licenses his name to Kinkade Village, and there are numerous other off-brands sold. Drugstores and dollar stores now often carry much smaller ones, about half the dimensions of the typical 1/64th-scales, and not as well-painted. Unpainted ones are sometimes available at craft stores as project kits.

Like many other [Christmas traditions](#), it has spread to other holidays, with a few U.S. companies making Halloween and even [Easter](#) villages.

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## Wassailing

**Wassailing** is the practice of going door-to-door singing [Christmas carols](#) and requesting in return [wassail](#) or some other form of refreshment. In modern times it is most commonly known through reference in various traditional Christmas carols (e.g., "Here we come a-wassailing / among the leaves so green").

The practice however has its roots in the middle ages as a reciprocal exchange between the feudal lords and their peasants as a form of recipient initiated charitable giving, to be distinguished from begging. This point is made in the song "Here We Come A-Wassailing", when the wassailers inform the lord of the house that

"we are not daily beggars that beg from door to door but we are friendly neighbors whom you have seen before."

The lord of the manor would give food and drink to the peasants in exchange for their blessing and goodwill, i.e...

"Love and joy come to you,  
And to you your wassail too;  
And God bless you and send you  
a Happy New Year"

... which would be given in the form of the song being sung. Wassailing is the background practice against which a carol such as "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" can be made sense of.

The example of the exchange is seen in their demand for "figgy pudding" and "good cheer", i.e., the [wassail](#) beverage, without which the wassailers in the song will not leave, "we won't go until we get some."

In cider-producing areas of England, such as the West Country, wassailing also referred to drinking (and singing) the health of trees in the hopes that they might better thrive.

An old rhyme goes: "Wassaile the trees, that they may beare / You many a Plum and many a Peare: / For more or lesse fruits they will bring, / As you do give them Wassailing."

## The Traditional Wassail Ceremony

Some scholars prefer a pre-Christian explanation of the old traditional ceremony of Wassailing. How far the tradition dates back is unknown but it has undeniable connections with Pagan ritual. Of recent times the word Wassail (from the Anglo-Saxon toast *wæs þu hæl*, "be thou hale" -- i.e., "be in good health") has come to be synonymous with Christmas but this is incorrect. The pre-Christian tradition of wassailing far outdates the celebration of Christmas. Traditionally the Wassail is celebrated on [Twelfth Night](#) (6th January). However most people insist on wassailing on 'Old Twelvey Night' (17th January) as that would have been the correct date before the introduction of the Gregorian Calendar in 1752. The purpose of Wassailing is to awake the cider apple trees and to scare away evil spirits to ensure a good harvest of fruit in the Autumn. The ceremonies of each wassail varies from village to village but they generally all have the same core elements. A wassail King and Queen to lead the proceedings, and song and/or a processional tune to be played/sung from one orchard to the next, the wassail Queen will be lifted up into the boughs of the tree where she will place toast that has been soaked in Wassail from the Clayen Cup as a gift the tree spirits and to show them the fruits of what they created the previous year. Then an incantation is usually recited such as

Here's to thee, old apple tree, That blooms well, bears well. Hats full, caps full, Three bushel bags full, An' all under one tree. Hurrah! Hurrah!

Then the assembled crowd will sing and shout and bang drums and pots & pans and generally make a terrible racket until the gunsmen give a great final volley through the branches to make sure the work is done and then off to the next orchard. Perhaps unbeknown to the general public, this ancient English tradition is still very much thriving today. The West Country is the most famous and largest cider producing region of the country and some of the most important wassails are held in Carhampton (Somerset) and Whimble (Devon).

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## Wigilia

**Wigilia** (pronounced: "vyg-ILY-uh") is the traditional [Christmas Eve](#) vigil supper in Poland, held of course on December 24.

Wigilia comes from the Latin word *vigilare*, "to watch", and means literally 'Eve'. The feasting traditionally begins once the first star has been sighted (usually by the children) in the heavens at dusk (around 5 p.m.). Therefore [Christmas](#) is also sometimes called "*Gwiazdka*" (the little star, referring to the Star of Bethlehem).

Children usually decorate the [Christmas tree](#) on this day (if it has not been set up before). A bundle of hay is placed under the tablecloth or in each of the four corners of the room to symbolize the fact that Jesus was born in a manger.

As a game, children would remove pieces of straw from under the table. Green would mean a year of wealth or possibly a marriage, while a black piece of hay would mean bad luck much like the "piece of coal" represents in modern Christmas lore. The drawing of hay was only for fun and was rarely paid attention to. Various other divinations are semi-seriously practiced such as hiding a nut (or another small food piece) in a cake and dividing it among family members. Whoever finds the nut inside his portion is guaranteed to have a successful year.

Another tradition is leaving one extra empty plate for a stranger. This is to celebrate the tradition of hospitality in Poland. The extra seat was left open just in case a traveler, family members, or friends appeared at the door, so there would be a place for them to sit. It also represents a place for family members who have died, or in some traditions symbolizes hospitality for the baby Jesus.

Family members begin the celebration with a prayer and breaking of the Christmas wafer ([opBatek](#) - symbolising the bread ingested daily — our day-to-day common life) and wishing each other good fortune in the upcoming new year. Readings from the [Bible](#) concerning the nativity of Jesus are practiced in the more religious households. In the countryside, it is customary to feed livestock (though not dogs, cats, and other pets) with the wafer, and the tradition promises that during Wigilia animals may speak.

After sharing the wafer the supper begins. The number of dishes is traditionally established to be either twelve (in Kraków region) or an odd number (in Silesia). The number twelve is symbolic of the number of months in the coming year as well as to celebrate the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Traditional dishes include breaded carp filet, potatoes, carp or chicken in aspic, łurek (in Silesia), kutia, pierogi, barszcz, uszka or a soup of cabbage and yellow peas, kluski, fried fish fillets, herring in oil, potatoes, mushroom or fish soup, and different salads. Wigilia is observed as a black fast, and as such Poles abstain from eating meat on this day. In some traditions,

As the animals of the household are to be treated as people for the day, Wigilia is a meatless meal.

The vigil supper concludes with family members giving gifts to one another. Christmas carols are also sung. Some families attend the traditional midnight mass ([pasterka](#)).

It is still believed that whatever happens on the Wigilia day has an impact on the following year. So, if a quarrel should arise, it foretells a quarrelsome and troublesome year. If, in the morning the first visiting person is a man, it means good luck, if a woman, one might expect misfortune. Everyone, however, is glad when a mailman comes by, for it means money and success in the future.

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## About the author

### **Nicolae Sfetcu**

Owner and manager with MultiMedia SRL and MultiMedia Publishing House.

Project Coordinator for European Teleworking Development Romania (ETD)

Member of Rotary Club Bucuresti Atheneum

Cofounder and ex-president of the Mehedinti Branch of Romanian Association for Electronic Industry and Software

Initiator, cofounder and president of Romanian Association for Telework and Teleactivities

Member of Internet Society

Initiator, cofounder and ex-president of Romanian Teleworking Society

Cofounder and ex-president of the Mehedinti Branch of the General Association of Engineers in Romania

Physicist engineer - Bachelor of Physics, Major Nuclear Physics. Master of Philosophy.

### **Contact**

Email: [nicolae@sfetcu.com](mailto:nicolae@sfetcu.com)

Online Media: <https://www.telework.ro/>

Facebook/Messenger: <https://www.facebook.com/nicolae.sfetcu>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/nicolae>

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/nicolaesfetcu>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/NicolaeSfetcu>